

Dragons Loops

by Saphroneth

Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Humor

Language: English

Characters: Hiccup, Toothless

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2011-08-20 13:46:36

Updated: 2015-06-22 20:33:06

Packaged: 2016-04-26 11:52:45

Rating: T

Chapters: 13

Words: 149,829

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Hiccup and the other characters of How To Train Your Dragon, caught in a series of time loops along the lines of Innortal's. What happens when a boy and his dragon take a jaunt across the multiverse? (Now contains other dragons at times. Like Pern.)

1. Chapter 1

The Time Loops are a concept that's around a lot, but I first encountered them in the ones done by Innortal. Basically, a Groundhog Day style loop for one (or more) characters, through their entire continuity. Crossovers start coming in after a while.

This is about a year's worth of Loops based around the characters of How To Train Your Dragon.

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><p>Loop 1<p>

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><p>Hiccup Horrendous Haddock, heir of sorts to the Hairy Hooligans of Berk, was outwardly eager to get involved with the defence of the village against the dragons that assailed it. Inwardly he was feeling sick over what he had to do.<p>

He once again had to cripple his closest friend, and most dear companion.

At first he had tried not shooting down the Night Fury, but had been so tearingly alone for the entire loop that he could not bring himself to again. Then he'd tried firing to merely trap the dragon, but it seemed that any shot that hit at all resulted in the loss of the tail fin, or one of the second-wings, or - one terrible time - the entire right _wing._

So he'd resigned himself to shooting Toothless down in exactly the same way every loop, and simply explaining everything to the dragon before releasing him, and why over the next few weeks. At least the tail fin and saddle were both now regularly perfect the first time, and he could be flying perfectly with Toothless before the week was out, or sooner depending on Toothless' reaction.

He was midway through his work schedule of repairing damaged weapons from the raid when he noticed something.

The catapult was not damaged at all.

Hardly daring to hope, Hiccup simply dropped what he was doing - damping down the forge first - and gazed out the window. No screech, no blue fireballs, nothing.

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><p>Next morning, he slipped out early (his Dad had actually praised him for not doing something stupid that night) and headed northeast to the crash site (it was always the same, even when Toothless had lost his wing).<p>

Nothing.

Then he went to the cove, hope and the fear of disappointment warring in his chest.

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><p>He needn't have worried. As soon as he was through the tunnel of rock, he caught sight of a familiar dark form, sitting patiently by the water's edge.<p>

His voice caught in the back of his throat.

"Hi, Toothless. Guess we're in this... weird... thing together now, huh."

The dragon nodded solemnly.

Toothless approached as Hiccup scrambled down the rock face to him, and listened to Hiccup's rushed words. Hiccup, for his part, was trying to speak while his resolve was still firm.

"Look, buddy, I'll un-understand if you don't want me to ride you anymore, what with your - your fin being okay, and-"

He had got no further before Toothless had brought round his tail - his gloriously _intact_ tail - and slapped Hiccup lightly across the face, before crouching down and looking plaintively at the not-really-a-Viking.

Hiccup was crying in joy and relief at the gesture. "Okay, that's pretty clear. Just let me get the saddle done again, okay?"

Toothless looked vaguely disappointed, but nodded.

"Now, what we need to do is work out how to use these things to our advantage - and for a laugh. What do you say to having a bit of fun with Dragon Training tomorrow?"

Toothless looked at his rider, and after a second, evil grins spread across both faces.

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><p>"And today's dragon, the Gronckle."<p>

"Wait," Snotlout asked nervously, "aren't you going to teach us _first?_"

Gobber grinned. "I believe in learning on the job."

He opened the door, and Toothless shot out, made a bee-line for Hiccup, and glomped him.

Gobber dropped his arm.

"Hey, Gobber," Hiccup gasped around Toothless' relentless licks, "I think this one's a lot nicer than a Gronckle for the first lesson, anyway. What kind of Dragon 'licks it's victims'?"

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><p>Loop 2<p>

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><p>"I've had it with this Dragon Training. I defect!"<p>

Hiccup jumped over the cliff and disappeared in a black blur - which slowed and gave a flyby, letting them all see the Night Fury in all his glory.

Of course, Toothless promptly blasted the entire training ring roof apart, blew the doors open, and generally ruined it for everyone else.

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><p>Loop 3<p>

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><p>Hiccup laughed aloud as the Green Death rampaged over Berk after a particularly trying early loop's bullying.<p>

"Still think that riding dragons is a useless thing to think about, huh?"

Unnoticed by the Anchor, Toothless was watching these events with a contemplative eye.

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><p>Loop 4<p>

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><p>"Wow, this loop sucks, huh?"<p>

Toothless, at about five inches long and actually lacking any teeth - or real use apart from as a distraction - nodded glumly.

"Hopefully there's no Green Death here..."

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><p>Loop 5<p>

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><p>The Nightmare crawled up the tower, the fire surrounding it ignited the planks as it crawled on them. Stoic the vast gripped his hammer.<p>

"I'll take care of this!"

But before he could attack a whistling sound filled the air, along with the cry of "Night Fury! Get down!'"

The nightmare gave him a look that could only be described as a smirk, just before the blue fireball blasted it from the tower. Stoic was dumbfounded.

"What in Odin's Name?"

A black blur sped past him and a familiar voice shouted "Hi dad, explain later!"

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><p>Loop 6<p>

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><p>Hiccup and Toothless watched in awe as the village burned.<p>

The red death sent another sheet of flame onto the village, yet again destroying the recently "built houses of the Vikings, melting their axes and lightly roasting their sheep. And their right socks.

Astrid from her seat on the back of the mighty Red Death laughed, screaming "You will fear me! You will ALL fear me!"

Hiccup turned to Toothless and said, simply:

"I blame you for this."

Toothless shrugged.

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><p>Loop 7<p>

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><p>Hiccup, of Ista weyr, stood apprehensively on the hatching ground as the humming of the Ista dragons intensified.<p>

It was clear what was going on, and the memories of his early life in the loop left no doubt that if Toothless was here as well, which seemed likely, he was going to have to find him soon.

His only problem was that, apart from knowing him to be black, unlike the other dragon colours in this loop, he had no idea how to. He had never seen a Night Fury egg, and there was competition of sorts here as well. He recognized the other trainees from Berk all present, seemingly not aware of the loops as there was no sudden 'what the hell is going on here' from any of them, and this was as unlike Berk in setting as you could get - volcanically heated soft sand, four-foot dragon eggs lying on the sand, _near the equator_-

He broke off that thought as the hopefuls began moving forward under the watchful gaze of the Ista queen, and he followed hastily, not wanting to miss his chance.

* * *

><p>Most of the shells had broken now, with Astrid, lucky as she was, Impressing the Queen egg, and the other trainees getting one each of Bronze, Brown, and Blue and Green for the twins.<p>

'At least they'll be easy to tell apart this time around,' thought Hiccup sardonically, before hearing the sound of cracking shell in front of him.

Crouching, his heart raced. 'Oh, please let this be...'

The egg cracked perfectly down the middle and a hatchling - _black, oh thank goodness, black - _tumbled out and almost instantly locked eyes with him.

His last thought before their shared awareness, the feeling of a bond so strong that both halves lived and died willingly as one, swept him away into euphoria was the sardonic:

Well, that makes us Toothleth and H'cup, then, with the local naming conventions.

That it does, Rider.

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><p>Loop 8<p>

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><p>"So... any weapon, right? I mean, we can use a weapon that's not on this rack in Dragon Training, yes?"<p>

"Aye... so what's your choice, Hiccup? Not another weird catapult thing?"

"No, but sort of related. Go ahead, release the Gronckle."

"Right. Now, what's the first thing you need to fight a Dragon?"

"Artillery support. Fire!"

The buzzing of the Gronckle was terminated abruptly in a huge explosion, and bits of Gronckle rained down around the training arena.

"What? I checked, and nowhere does it say you can't take out a dragon with another dragon. Granted, they were probably thinking in terms of using one as a club, but... Bye!"

And with that, the looping duo went between and emerged in the cove before they burst out laughing.

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><p>Loop 9<p>

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><p>"Well, this is certainly an interesting diversion from normal!"<p>

—...—

"This is something I'll have to look into more! I mean, drawing as a way of producing magic - I love this! You're just bitter because you're having to use something smaller than a tree to draw with. And carry me on your nose."

...

"Come on! I know this is a silent protagonist type deal, but can you at least pretend to communicate with me? I mean, I'm a Poncle at the moment."

...

"Look, you're supposed to be the sun god in this loop, not some kind of personification of raw moping. And for the record, I'm being in character. Issun is a very annoying person, and far be it from me to deny you the full Amaterasu exper—"

GRRRR

"... I'll be good."

* * *

><p>Toothlegami skidded to a halt at the edge of the collapsed walkway.<p>

"Aren't you going to go down there?" Hiccup asked from his place on the god's nose.

In reply, the Sun God flicked his tail at the ruin, it becoming instantly whole again with but a movement of the Celestial

Brush.

Hiccup squinted. "Huh. Restoration, never thought of that. Nice work, toothieEEK!"

The Poncle went flying into the blackness below the stairs. Toothlegami shook his head with a snort, and, flaring his wings to their fullest extent, flew on up to Orochi's lair.

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><p>"The time has come! O sacred moon of the heavens, come forth and pierce this darkness! Bear witness to the beast's demise upon my trusty sword Tohenboku!"<p>

Susanoo blinked. Hang on. There was something missing.

"Hey, lizard! Where's the demon Orochi?"

Toothlegami looked smug. A voice came from the ground, where a small green dot could just be made out.

"The great, powerful and insufferably smug sun god Toothlegami defeated him half an hour ago."

* * *

><p>Down in the catacombs of Moon Island, Moegami fluffed his feathers and went back to staring at the wall.<p>

"So boredâ€| so very, very boredâ€| why am I even a separate god, anyway?"

* * *

><p>Nine-tails revealed herself in all her haughty splendour, and roared her defiance at the Sun Godâ€|<p>

Who set her on fire.

Hiccup lounged back on one of Toothlegami's shoulder flares and enjoyed the sight of the Ruler of Oni island running frantically in circles, trying to extinguish herself. "So. Turns out all that fur wasn't such a good fashion choice anyway. And-" a splash. "Ooh, there she goes into the lava lake."

The demonic duchess screamed high and loud. **"Why is there lava on the top floor of a palace?"**

"Don't ask us, Toothie here flew over it."

The empress appeared in the crystal ball. "I suppose, then, that most of the challenging tasks you face are made much easier by the God's powers of flight?

"Yeah, strange that."

* * *

><p>Kabegami yowled, bored, on top of his enormous tower.<p>

* * *

><p>"Now, we have a race through the forest of-"<p>

Toothlegami took off.

"You know, for a God you're not very sporting!"

* * *

><p>"Ooh, look! Your futurepast self!"

Toothlegami looked appraisingly at the divine form before him.

It wasn't really very different at all.

"_Watch out for the Loop in Lina Inverse's universe. It's a doozy."_

Toothlegami nodded amicably. _"Thanks for the tip."_

* * *

><p>The robotic sphere of Yami, the Dark God, ominously howled with static and began to unfold, bristling with weapons in defence of its' master.<p>

Toothlegami ate the fish.

After a pause as the universe checked its' error handling conditions, Yami vanished.

Down in Nippon, Hiccup flashed a grin at the sky. "Not bad, big guy. Though if you'd actually waited until I could do the brushwork that would have been nice."

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><p>Loop 10<p>

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><p>Hiccup Horrendous Haddock... 3 points.<p>

"Oh, come on! I got the egg, didn't I? Get the golden egg, protect the others, that was the point, right?"

"You blew up a Hungarian Horntail! For goodness' sake!"

Sheesh. Not like there were rules against using your familiar in the Triwizard Tournament, and fighting enormous dragons was sort of something that Hiccup was actually _good_ at, after all.

Not his fault nobody had noticed that Toothless had been under a shrinking charm for three and a half years.

"Fine... I'll make it up on the second task."

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><p>Any plans for next time, Rider?

_Not really decided yet, dear heart. Dragonese negotiations, use _between _jumps again, or you could just learn that nifty mind control trick the Green Death does and order the Horntail to sod off._

Don't you think we're overdoing it, teleporting all over the place to solve all our problems?

_Not at all! The time to worry is if you use mind control to solve all your problems, like Sasuke. Unless you _want_ to spend an hour at the bottom of a lake in February. Not that this is quite as cold as Berk, but..._

Fine, fine. So we teleport both ways, then?

Yes. Let's see them mark me down when the second task takes me three minutes or less.

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><p>"Three, two, one... Go!"<p>

Ludo blasted on his whistle and the competitors were off.

Apart from Hiccup, that was. He was just getting on to his familiar, at the enlarged size, and - taking off? Did he even know what the task was?

Then the duo disappeared.

Fifteen seconds later they were back, soaking wet, with Astrid Hofferson clutched in the paws of the dragon.

Hiccup smirked, as Toothless started drying them off with carefully measured fireballs.

"That more to your liking?"

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><p>You know, call me an idiot, but we haven't even started destroying the Horcruxes. Shouldn't we?

Come on, Toothless, we can screw over his resurrection ritual as it is by just jumping straight back to Hogwarts. "Blood of the - dammit."_ Besides, any of them we take out before number seven - me - is a bit premature, as I'm fairly certain Dragonfire is as good as Basilisk venom, and we need to do the lot to take him out._

Bit hard for the bastard to come back if I've digested him...

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><p>Loop 11<p>

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><p>"That student of yours is amazing. How did he achieve Bankai so fast?"<p>

"Well, I was planning on using the forced materialization dummy to get him to be able to subdue his spirit, but it wasn't really necessary. As soon as the spirit materialized it... glomped... him. Now he's got it released all the time, and his control's really improving from walking around in permanent Bankai without levelling Sereitei or running out of energy. I did ask him how come he's so good with the sword, though, for a former human, and he mentioned something about 'bloody loops where Toothless is tiny only being good for one thing'* and refused to elaborate."

"So do you think he can complete the objective of the Rescue Rukia mission?"

"I asked, and he mentioned 'really sort of abusing that power, but it's too convenient to resist' and assured me that if he's alerted bare seconds before we need him, it'll be enough".

"Allow me to be the first to say that he somehow scares me. Maybe it's his friend..."

"You mean the nutcase with a spirit axe, the nutcase Quincy who _throws_ spirit axes, the nutcase twins who beat up each other and the enemy with superpowerful punches, or the huge guy with a hammer?"

"... Remind me again why we need to rely on them?"

"Because we are lazy and have lost the instruction manuals for our Bankai or, in my case, my sword."

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><p>Loop 12<p>

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><p>"So tell me again what happened?"

"He saw the nazgÃ°l, whistled, and some strange black dragon came out of nowhere and shot down their fell beasts."

"Well, looks like more than his bow - skills qualify him for the Rangers, then, even if he's the _clumsiest _we've ever had."

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><p>Loop 13<p>

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><p>An ominous corona of dark purple light sporting two flicking tails surrounded the demon container from Konoha. His green eyes developed slits, his body hunched down, and great wings of pure chakra formed from his back...<p>

And he jumped into the ocean.

"Sensei, what the hell was that?"

"_That_ is the instinctive behaviour of the Two Tailed Demon Dragon. Apparently it attacked the village because of a rumour of fresh cod. In large quantities."

"So how are we supposed to beat this Amachi guy now?"

"Just wait until he uses his fish form, and then the problem will be solved."

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><p>Loop 14<p>

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><p>"Beard of Thor! What is that!"

The vast form of the queen of the dragons' nest erupted from the ground in front of the Vikings, and roared defiance at the air and at the puny Vikings standing in front of it. How dare they!

"That, Dad, Gobber, is the Green Death."

The Viking chief and his entire raiding party swung round to look at Hiccup, sitting nonchalantly on the rocks by the shore, the brief sight of a metal cylinder at his side hinting to any who knew of the loops how he'd got the dragon next to him out of the cruel chains and cage.

Toothless turned to Hiccup and gave a single honk.

"What? Red Death? That makes no sense! There's hardly any red on it at all! Why call it the Red Death when it is clearly not red?"

Another honk.

"Okay, so there's not much green either, but come on! There's got to be some sort of logic to all this or there's no way to tell what's even going on. I mean, all the other named make at least some sense, right?"

Toothless just looked at Hiccup silently.

"Fine, so Gronckle makes very little sense as a name, or Deadly Nadder, or even Terrible Terror. But it's the principle of the thing!"

Toothless and Hiccup looked contemplatively at the Queen, who was currently in the same mode of thought as the Vikings; that things were far outside the accepted norm in this situation.

"There's a lot of yellow."

Toothless let out a sigh and gestured with his tail, muttering something in a series of rawrs and honks.

"No, I will not give in to this peer pressure! You want it to be

called the Blue Death, then go ahead, but that's not what I'm going to call it. I personally think it should be called the Freaky Death if anything. I mean, six eyes? That's not right."

The Queen rose up to her full enormous height and inhaled monstrously, preparing to obliterate this affront to her regal dignity.

Peyow - BOOOOOOM!

Hiccup scratched Toothless' head affectionately as if nothing had happened as bits of Freaky Death rained down around them.

"Right, off for tea, Toothless? I think I have some extra cod ready for toni-!"

Toothless broke with the calm demeanour he'd shown for the entire proceedings and practically threw Hiccup into the saddle, setting off into the air and between in a heartbeat.

"Gobberâ€|"

"Yes, Stoic?"

"What have you been teaching my son, and can I sign up?"

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><p>Loop 15<p>

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><p>"See! I told you! Always the left ones!"

Hiccup and Toothless looked on with identical expressions of slack disbelief. Almost thirty of what could, in all honesty, only be called trolls were visible in the back of the cave, behind the large mound at the entrance.

A mound formed entirely of thousands of left socks.

"Well, Toothless, we have two choices here. Either we go back to Berk and inform Dad that Gobber has been right all along_, trolls exist, they steal your left socks, and they appear to be completely bonkers, or-"

Toothless cut short the conversation by flapping his wings, sending the socks into the cave, and spitting a small fireball at them.

Vikings are smelly. Their socks are even more so. Half a ton of Viking socks is also classified as "a large, hair trigger bomb".

Hiccup regretted that Gobber would still appear slightly crazy, but that was better than carrying evidence back to Berk_.

"Okay, boy, we never speak of this, right?"

Toothless nodded.

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><p>Loop 16<p>

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><p>Stoic the vast watched in slack - jawed disbelief as his son - his short, unremarkable, clumsy son - cheerfully walked into Berk, nonchalantly clutching a leash in his right hand.<p>

On the other end of the leash was a twenty foot, black-scaled, bewinged monster.

"HICCUP! What in the name of Thor is that... that... thing!"

Hiccup glanced to his right at Toothless, who had sat back on his haunches as the pair stopped moving at the shout.

"This, dad, is - if you'll let me have him - my new pet. He followed me halfway home before I decided I may as well see if he tolerates a leash, and he didn't complain one bit."

"That's not what I mean, son. WHY do you have a dragon in the village?"

Hiccup once more looked at Toothless, before adopting a confused expression.

"Dragon? He's not a dragon. Trust me, I checked. Nothing close to him in the Dragon Manual. I think he's some sort of winged salamander or something."

Stoic glowered at the 'winged salamander'. True, it wasn't displaying any dragonish traits, like going for the kill, or ruthlessly attacking any human within arm's reach. The boy was even right - no illustration in the manual matched.

In fact, Loki take him for a practical joke, but as he looked on Toothless - now chasing butterflies - Stoic could only describe him as... cute.

'I wonder when it turned into him', he thought to himself, before shaking off the thought.

"Be that as it may, Hiccup, I can't let... can't let you..."

Toothless was now essentially begging like an eager dog, paws up, eyes in full puppy mode, letting out a plaintive whine...

Oh, it's too early in the morning for this.

"Make sure he doesn't eat everything in sight, and you're responsible for his behaviour! Outside only on a leash, housebroken, doesn't knock anything over..."

"Great!" Hiccup had perked up at the words. "Thanks, dad!"

And the two were off to the Haddock's house before Stoic was done

talking.

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><p>Loop 17<p>

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><p>"Stop the fight!"<p>

"No, Dad, I need you to see this."

Okay, Toothless, here's your cue.

Suddenly the Kill Ring was flooded with light in a kaleidoscope of different colours from Nadders shining beams of sunlight from shields through their wings. Several hundred Terrors started going into an elaborate three - dimensional series of gyrations. The Gronckles formed a chorus line, providing the supporting dance along with the Terrors, and a half dozen extremely rare dragons - a Thunderdrum, a Boneknapper, and a few more bizarre still - formed a band and started playing very high quality music. Two - or four - Zipplebacks began producing the "stage mist" and above it all a Night Fury flew in lazy circles, most of his attention on controlling the swarm of dragons below, but occasionally providing firework displays as a counterpoint to the Gronckles doing the same thing.

The Monstrous Nightmare in the centre of the ring dropped its' wary attitude and began dancing along with the small human who had - once again - failed the "first kill" test.

Never quite this spectacularly, though.

The two - with Hiccup on vocals - had got through "I'd rather be different", "Through the Fire and Flames" (using the unique talents of the Nightmare to provide said fire and flames, and the odd Heavenly Spin defence from Hiccup to produce a blue flash that drove away the explosion from the Zippleback 'stage mist') and the instrumental "Firebird" from the musical of the same name and were halfway through "Sticks and Stones" before anyone in the audience was over their shock.

Fortunately, the first to do so was Astrid, who waited out that song and then - having decided Hiccup's plan to avoid having to kill a dragon was essentially to confuse everyone so much they forgot - took her turn, with "Happily Ever After" (her having asked for "anything", Toothless fed her the lyrics via Bluebell with the remainder of his free brainpower.)

Hiccup had been surprised that both of them were "awake" at last - especially as the previous Loop had been another one on Pern and the pair had the shared telepathy right off the bat - and had completely forgotten to let her know the plan for today, but she coped admirably, and the two were through another three songs (including "Light My Fire" and the duet of "Guide you home") before Stoic finally unfroze and the two had to escape via Nightmare.

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><p>The next day, Gobber had approached Hiccup (the village was

essentially pretending nothing had happened - it seemed rather more like a dream than reality, and nobody wanted to find out it had been, in fact, a completely nuts dream of their own) and asked for a request.<p>

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><p>Loop 18<p>

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><p>The Viking tribe of the Strong Noses were invading Berk, and the defenders were sadly outnumbered by the Vikings from the more southerly tribe. Hiccup realized that there was no real way that his Dad and the other Hooligans were going to be able to defend the town. At least, not without help...<p>

"**Hey, Terrors. Attack only the Vikings from the ships and you each get a fish**_."_

"**Fish? Each! Deal, Dragon - speaker!**"

* * *

><p>Stoic the vast was tiring - even he, the chief of the tribe - as he defended the main route through Berk against the invading Noses. Knowing that he had little hope of survival even if the Noses were driven off now, as they were more vulnerable to dragon attack than ever before with no catapults left, he gritted his teeth, set his stance, and prepared to go down fighting.<p>

Then he saw his son - what was his beloved if pathetic son doing out here! - dash past, with a swirl of colour all around the lower two thirds of his body. Hiccup stopped for a few seconds and made a sweeping gesture towards one of the knots of Strong Nose Vikings.

Stoic the vast watched in shock as around fifty Terrible Terrors descended on the indicated Vikings and reduced them to panicking wrecks in seconds.

Hiccup, who had never before been anything like graceful, was almost dancing as he directed the scores of Terrors towards the enemy and meticulously shredded their attack with his keen mind and flying piranha.

Finally, when the Noses had fled the island - rather go to Hel for eternity for fleeing battle than face that hideous swarm again - Hiccup slipped from the poised stance he had been in to a more normal, casual one, and looked up at his Father.

"Okay, so I used Dragons. Big deal, it worked. And be honest, that was pretty cool, right?"

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><p>Loop 19<p>

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><p>Hiccup knew it was a bonding procedure many dragons did, but that didn't make him feel any better - he knew it was just a way for the dragon to gauge your trust. But when the - let's say Yellow - Death opened its mouth and a half whale, a large number of fish and a rather confused Gronckle slid out he had to admit that he was a little apprehensive. The puppyish expression of joy it was wearing wasn't helping. He turned to Toothless.<p>

"You think of a way out of this."

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Toothless watched in awe as the village was destroyed.<p>

The Yellow Death rampaged amongst the buildings of the village, smashing them aside with its' enormous bashing tail. The houses were being reduced to matchsticks, which was at least a nice change.

Spitelout laughed, a deep, booming sound, as he visited his pent - up wrath on the village for the fact that his son had not been chosen as heir due to the far less Viking Hiccup.

Hiccup turned to Toothless and said, sheepishly, '' Okay, maybe this one is my fault a little bit."

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><p>Loop 20<p>

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><p>"That sword of yours, brat... it has interesting abilities, I'll grant you that, but did you really think you could stand up to a captain?"<p>

"Oh, trust you people to insult while pretending to pay a compliment. And my sword, Kyouran, has interesting abilities, but its' shikai isn't really complete. It's a sniper's weapon, with speed boosts, camouflage and a ranged attack - but that's not my style. Not quite. It all fits together much better - I'll fight you much better - at a higher level."

"Watch your mouth! You make it sound as if you've already achieved..."

"Yeah."

Byakuya Kuchiki stepped back from the ryoka. 'Impossible!'

"My final release only grants one extra power. Flight. Bankai!"

As the smoke whipped up by the transformation cleared, Byakuya saw... nothing.

Then a horrible screech rent the air, and an azure bolt of fire, far larger than the ryoka's shikai could manage, ripped into the shield of blossom the Kuchiki clan head had barely reestablished in time.

"Kyouran no Yoru, my Bankai. Do you want to continue, and find out just how much my speed boost is amplified by the final release?"

"You may be fast, brat," called Byakuya to the now empty air, "but I trained under the goddess of flash steps herself, Yoruichi Shihoin!

The reply drifted back out of the clear sky. "That's as may be, but you forget something. So did I!"

The invader, seen for a split second atop a great, sleek black dragon, launched four fireballs in quick succession, moving so fast that the four hit from completely different directions at the same time.

Byakuya considered his situation, and made the decision.

"Senkei!"

* * *

><p>Well, Hiccup thought wryly as the thousand swords began to form their cylinder in the second stage of Byakuya's Bankai, at least he's already being rather more serious than he'd probably like. Now, where's that firestone?_

It was time to see if those swords could be shattered without the command from Byakuya.

* * *

><p>Loop 21<p>

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><p>"It's working! It's working! I've got a dragon!" called the Professor, his portal having caught the signature of a dragon transiting between worlds and pulled it to Glimmer.<p>

The dragon that emerged from the portal was about four feet in length, jet black, with proportionately huge wings and intelligent green eyes.

"You're a dragon?" asked Hunter, the cheetah's expectations having been more in line with a thirty foot monstrosity than this small creature.

Toothless shrugged, before a fireball shot across the nearby field and destroyed the portal back to the dragon realms.

Three seconds later Crush and Gulp had been exploded and Ripto was fleeing desperately from the vengeful dragon, who had concluded that:

-Not human.

-Attacker.

-Hiccup hasn't said to stop.

Therefore:

-FAIR GAME!

The professor picked himself up off the ground, and Elora commented:
"Well, that worked. Though we'd better be ready to send him back soon
- I doubt we want to know what he's like when he's impatient."

* * *

><p>Toothless stared at the cheetah flatly.<p>

"Come on, you need to learn how to glide, right?"

The Night Fury launched himself ten feet into the air in a single, lithe leap and completed the entire course before landing, then taking off again and hovering to make extra clear the point that, as a fairly mature dragon, he. Could. FLY!

* * *

><p>Toothless walked out of the portal in disgust. Always with the rules, or the complaints.<p>

'Got to use a skateboard.'

'Can't just shoot down the UFO, have to run away from it.'

'It doesn't count as winning the race if you set fire to all the other competitors and steal the prize.'

'No, the talking kangaroo, flying penguin, smart yeti and insane monkey are neither mutants nor evil.'

'Jumping puzzles are for jumping over, not flying or blowing up.'

'Please, when we say to save us from the sorceress, we rather hoped you'd sort out the mess she left of our worlds rather than just blowing her up and partying the rest of your time here.'

'Stop making our powerups look bad.'

'Please stop, we're running out of sheep.'

Oh well, at least he got the unique experience of being able to beat up an annoying bear _and_ have shiny things come out! That was a first.

And how did that bear convince him to buy all those bridges anyway?

* * *

><p>Loop 22<p>

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><p>"Interesting. Your Hollow side, like your Zanpakuto spirit, is a dragon. In fact, so is your Tailed Beast mode from Naruto's universe, your Jusyenko cursed form, your Nekoken analogue, your Animagus form and your Patronus. I'm more concerned about the fact that they're the same dragon... and apparently fighting over you in your subconscious."

"Okay. That explains the headache. Thanks, Ranma. Now, I need vast amounts of fish and that book on how to speak dragonese."

* * *

><p>Loop 23<p>

* * *

><p>The Viking Anchor playing the part of a marine in an Avatar body was crouched over a rock outcrop on Iknimaya, and took a moment to ponder the progress so far on this rather bizarre loop.<p>

He spent most of the time drawing when not going through a punishing regime of physical training, learning about Pandora and reporting on the progress made in same to the scientists. The entire planet was spectacular, by day or night, and several sketchbooks' worth were full from the time in each body - the pocket universe trick apparently transferring things over from Human to Avatar. His main regret there was that the art could not capture the majesty of a planet where everything was bioluminescent. Maybe using some sort of computer sketchpad he could come close-

"Hey, Hik'ku! Come on, this isn't something you can just ignore - all the People have done this by the time they're true warriors!"

Ah. Astyrid. He was fairly certain that wasn't the original name of that particular individual in this loop, and suspected from her behaviour that she was in fact Awake as he was, but couldn't quite prove it.

In general, though, this loop was something of a paradise. He was fast, tough, strong - and people were expecting him to be good at observing things! That alone was a welcome relief from Berk.

About the only problem was that Toothless hadn't shown up yet, but that was most likely about to be rectified, given where they were.

"And how do I tell if it's the right one?"

"Then," Astyrid said, her eyes laughing, "He will try to kill you."

"Great. Pain. Love it!"

At her familiar reaction to the words, he grinned. Finally! He then stepped forward, looking for the Ikran that was just that little bit different...

There.

He boldly stepped over to the black Ikran, and in one smooth motion, leapt astride its' back from behind and linked with it.

****Well, this is different. Talk about a new perspective on things. Do I really look like that from between the ears?***

****I suppose there's only supposed to be one partner with a consciousness, dear heart. But why hide up here? Why wait?***

****Have you any idea how funny it was to watch you scrambling up that path?***

****I wouldn't deign to think about something only your exalted draconicness could observe.***

****Flatterer.***

****No, sarcastic. Though sometimes with you there's no difference...***

* * *

><p>"You know, I wonder if you're technically an Ikran this time around. I mean you sort of look like one, but something tells me you're not as big as you could be yet."

Anything's possible. And I have it on good authority that I am, in fact, 'Really, really scary' in the opinion of the Ikran that I was with when you found me. In fact, I suspect I might be the apex air predator. Again. One of these days I might like not being the most dangerous thing around._

"Be careful what you wish for."

Hiccup's human body (with Rebreather) and Toothless were idly chatting on the floating mountain, near Grace's lab. She, for her part, was fascinated that the Ikran bond apparently went with the mind between the Avatar and the human body. If only she knew what it took to get this far...

I'm serious. Think what could be done from a position with hands._

"You can have hands anytime you want now, you've got lycanthropic powers as far as I recall. Did those follow you?

Not sure, don't care. I want to be the hero one of these times._

"And the loop where you saved three or four entire landmasses from Gnorks, Riptocs, Rhynocs, Earthshapers, mad wizards, psycho ducks and farmyard animals?"

Okay, the underdog hero._

"Hiccup!"

Grace ran over, her expression tight with worry.

"They're planning on blowing up the Na'vi Hometree. We've got to do something!"

"Okay. I think I can handle this."

Always with the I.

Hiccup glanced at Toothless. "Okay, _we_ can handle this."

That's better.

* * *

><p>The air fleet didn't do very well in its' attempt to blow up Hometree. Ikran riders were fairly effective once warned, and when Toothless grabbed the gunship and treated the entire crew to thirty seconds of total sensory deprivation _between_, even the Major was quick to surrender. The situation on Pandora then suffered an outbreak of sanity as the Tribes agreed to find as much of the valuable mineral as they could in non sacred sites, in return for human assistance in getting themselves recognized as sentient equals and Pandora declared a nature reserve.

* * *

><p>Loop 24<p>

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><p>Hiccup stood on the heaving deck of the frigate, shaking his head slightly as the memories from this new Loop slid into his mind.<p>

Apparently he was some sort of naval officer, and, moreover, this right in front of him was a dragon egg, one about to hatch, which meant once more the old routine of bonding with his first true friend.

'Well, at least I'm used to it, unlike the original from this particular loop. Are dragons really that looked down upon, for all their importance?'

Looking over it with an appraising eye, his first conclusion was that it was larger than normal, for Toothless at any rate.

Any further consideration was cut off as the egg began to hatch, and a familiar black snout emerged, followed by the rest of Toothless. He already looked to be at half - growth, so how big was he going to get?

"Hello. Are you the French? I seem to remember being around a lot of French speakers that last few months in the egg."

Hiccup found his voice just in time to reply.

"No, we are in fact the crew of an English frigate, one that I myself captain, and I suppose that, technically, your egg was a war - prize from the capture of the French sloop carrying you to your destination - though we would not do you the injustice of suggesting you yourself are our prize, and merely wish that you would decide as you see

fit.

Fooled you there, didn't I, Rider? Never seen anyone scramble for a diplomatic reply as hurriedly. Nice work getting your own memories across, though. And yes, this time I can actually talk.

"Well, you seem like a nice chap. I suppose I could get to like you - that is," and here, Toothless' eyes narrowed, though there was an undercurrent of mirth beneath the pleading tone his voice adopted, "if you have some fish for me?"

"I would not dream of approaching a hungry dragon - for newly hatched dragons must assuredly be hungry - with anything less than a lot of fish, rest assured."

"I see you are well - prepared. That is good. I should like a fellow like you as a rider."

Hiccup understood that the idea was to appear to conform to the standard course of events in the loop, overly formal and such (not to mention making it obvious that Toothless had chosen him and him alone), but a part of him started wondering how long they would have to act like this before being casual with one another.

* * *

><p>"Astrid? So you're here as well?"<p>

"Yes, so's Bluebell, though she shoots acid now. Right nasty stuff, too, burns right through ships' hulls."

"So, anything you can tell me about this dragon arm of the military we seem to have joined?"

"Main jobs are message - carrying, though not for Toothless or Bluebell, they're both heavy combat types, then there's antiship work, my department, and taking out opposing dragons. If Toothless blows things up as well as he did back on Berk-"

"Or anywhere else he's been roughly the right size."

"True, but if he can shoot his usual fireballs, then he's a good antiship, and if he can with the same accuracy he might as well be a general combatant. Let me know your preference, and I'll sort it out - got to love turning up in a Loop as a commodore already. I can get you a good crew as well."

I'm not sure about this, Rider. Why do we need a crew?

_So that we don't appear unusual. Besides, you're only at risk from other dragons anyway, and I won't be troubled by boarders - I still have _Kyouran_ here, though I won't try Bankai. The initial release should be enough, I can't imagine why it wouldn't, and I don't want to confuse people - including you - if it works. What do _you_ think would happen?_

Good point. Well, I suppose if they don't make a fuss in a dive.

_Dear heart, nobody alive could avoid being affected at least by you

in a dive. I just hide it well._

* * *

><p>The French dragons carried the second of the strange troopships to a gentle landing at Dover. Hiccup was furious - Astrid and the rest of the heavies were down at Gibraltar, Astrid refused to go between to help as that was completely impossible for the well - established breed her once and future Nadder was aping this Loop, and Toothless' breath weapon refused to awaken, if he even had one-

An unearthly screech sounded out, followed by a shouted "Hold on!" from Toothless, and every crewman checked their harnesses as Toothless went into a power dive.

Faster than normal, actually. Faster, in fact, than should have been strictly possible. Was Toothless using something supernatural to help?

What are you doing?

I just remembered what I can do to destroy things without a breath weapon - I make it still a week before I get it, so no good now. Brace for sound barrier!

Hiccup paled. _WHAT?_

* * *

><p>The huge, concussive, rippling boom that ripped over the French troops assembling in the small cleared area around their three currently landed troopships - and over the British militia trying to contain them, and the townsfolk, and the French dragons in the supporting units - drew their eyes to the sky - but too late. By the time they heard it, it was over - at least the bit nearest to them, but the rest was still going, and they watched in awe as a lone British black dragon blasted past the French carriers, the black moving so fast that the wind of the passage shattered the troopships like eggshells and disgorged several thousand French soldiers into the channel, where they would surrender to the picket fleet or drown.<p>

The French dragons and their crews, closest to the travel path, swore they heard a dozen screams and one loud complaint dopplered into near inaudible shrieks/rumbles as the black shape shot past.

When he reached the staging area, Toothless flattened the entire French army waiting to move into the transports with the enormous blast of wind, and flew lazily back to Dover with the satisfaction of a job well done - though the effect was slightly ruined when half his crew swore never to leave solid ground again.

* * *

><p>Loop 25<p>

* * *

><p>Well, in my defence, you really asked for this

one.

"Shut it, you, I still haven't got used to this."

Walking on two legs? Not that tricky.

"You try living with the knowledge that Stoic would have called you 'Toothrot' to frighten off trolls."

Been living with 'Hiccup' for centuries, talk to the tail.

"Keep that up and I use your uncomfortable saddle designs from the first Loop!"

* * *

><p>Loop 26<p>

* * *

><p>The villagers of Berk were in shock.<p>

Hundreds of dragons hovered overhead, in broad daylight, brazenly flouting the normal order of things - and getting away with it, too, with no catapults manned.

What was even stranger, though, was that they were holding a precise, well-spaced formation, laid out mostly by species.

Groups of a dozen Terrors on the back of a Gronckle, with a Nadder in front, were laid out in a grid in the air, with a Nightmare in front of each set of three such groups and a Zippleback beside each of them, a Terror on the Nightmare's shoulder.

Nightmares wearing insignia - and the occasional adorned Nadder - were above each nine groups, occasionally staring pointedly at a dragon slightly out of formation in their sections until said dragon sheepishly corrected itself.

Near the back were a dozen each of Thunderdrums and Skauldrons, led by two Nightmares and a Boneknapper with an ornate catapult on the blanket across his flank.

In front of and below this aerial armada was a small group of six dragons, two Timberjacks and an unknown black that most assumed to be a Night Fury, each with a Terror sitting in a comfortable position about their persons and the most impressive filigree of all the present dragons.

The Fury and his retinue landed in a clear space, and the black - clad Terror (and a couple noticed that the Terror was dressed and wearing insignia that suggested the position of Flag Lieutenant) pulled a scroll from a bag and fluttered slowly forward with it, passing it to Hiccup when he coolly strode from the crowd to take it.

Nodding his thanks to the Terror, he unrolled it and read aloud,

"TO Stoic the Vast, Chieftain of the Tribe of Hairy Hooligans of Berk, Master of the Northernmost Mark and Head of the clan Haddock,

from Brigadier - General His Grace Toothless Kyouran, first of that name, Duke of North Haven, Knight Commander of the Order of Smaug the Red, Holder of the Star of Polaris, four campaign ribbons, OM, DSO and bar, DFC and two bars, greetings.

I wish to make you and your people an offer, one that I, at least, feel is one of benefit to us both and to the benefit of all those under our respective commands. Though I would not presume to offer you any information that is not readily apparent to you without giving you time to assimilate it, I am sure that you should already be aware that the current military and diplomatic situation between your nation and my own is... somewhat less than optimal, and it is my belief that this can be rectified in short order by the import of the main body of this missive.

To be blunt, I wish to defect, I and all my brigade - the first of flight - to the banner and flag of Berk. My reasons for doing this are at least partly private, but I can share with your counsel the main reason for my decision.

The commander of the Dragonarmies in this area of the North, over the course of recent decades, has become... unstable. She has become no longer the peacekeeper that is the purpose of our forces, but has gradually changed into a bloated tyrant, feeding off the work of others such as myself and my forces, and indeed your own farmers.

I am more sorry than I can express that the change was too gradual for me to notice, in my blindness, and put a stop to until, less than a week ago, I, personally, was fired upon from the ground by a complex bolas apparatus that came within an inch of removing one of my tail fins and destroying forever my ability to fly unassisted.

It has been said that the closeness of Death concentrates the mind wonderfully, and in that moment I fully recognized what I had become. Once a proud officer in the forces of world peace and order, I was now little more than a bandit robbing others of the product of their hard work. To this end, I asked the officers of my brigade to consider the same issue, and then the enlisted. Within the day, I had unanimous support for the manoeuvre you see before you know, sir, and I determined to do so before another week had passed.

And so, here we are. I will submit myself to your authority as Lord of these lands, but will ask that I retain command of my Brigade, to employ it in the pursuit of what objectives you may set me as I see fit.

Yours,

Toothless Kyouran, Duke of etc. etc.

Hiccup rolled up the parchment and handed it back to the Terror, who accepted it, flew back to his superior, and replaced it with a flourish.

"So, Dad, what do you think? Good offer?"

* * *

><p>The Fat Death was confused. Less food had arrived in the last two days than before. And the Night Fury was missing. What was going

on?<p>

She soon found out, as her massive nostrils detected the smell of Zippleback gas - a lot of Zippleback gas - and she barely had time to flare her wings and start to try to escape before the entire dormant volcano exploded and buried her under at least a quarter mile of heavy volcanic rock.

* * *

><p>"I still think we should put a volcano - maybe with a yellow sunburst behind it on a field of black, representin' the darkness of her rule being erased by the glorious dawn of...er..."<p>

"Stortlout, say what you mean. 'The glorious dawn of an entire volcano blowing up at two o'clock in the afternoon' is what you meant, no matter what you said. Now, my idea is to add the dragons. They were really the main reason we could do this, perhaps even add Hiccup - he and the Brigadier seem to get along well. Knew he was different - who'd have thought that machine I forbade him from using would have such an impact, eh? Now we're fine for winter, and-"

"What my son may have done, while flattering for me to hear about, is not related to the task at hand! No, Gobber, this needs to have Viking elements as well! Maybe some sort of axe-"

"Oh, it's always axes with you, Stoic!"

"Fine words coming from the man who replaced his arm with one!"

"Why you-"

Hiccup turned from the sketchpad to look at the gigantic brawl shaping up in the hall, then aside to Toothless, who was laid on the floor.

"This is the third time they've had a brawl over the campaign badge. Wonder how they'd react to some of those grenade - epaulettes from Schlock's world."

Toothless shrugged. Meh.

* * *

><p>Loop 27<p>

* * *

><p>"I'm telling you, Ami, something's off with Sailor Moon."<p>

"Really, Rei? What let you know? That her main weapon is now an axe, or that her mooncat has turned into a dragon of some description, or perhaps that her standard battle style now involves chopping half of the Youma into fingernail - sized chunks and punting the other half into a decaying series of orbits?"

"No need to be like that."

"I'm personally more concerned by the fact that Tuxedo Mask hasn't shown up since Sailor Moon changed her demeanour. Who knows what he's doing?"

"Well, I've mainly been hiding from her."

"AAGH! Don't _do _that!"

"What?" Hiccup, replacing Tuxedo Mask, was genuinely confused. Wasn't the best thing to do when dealing with rampaging females to hide? They were, after all, often stronger than the men, and Astrid could now use more power per hit than the (Blue?) Death.

"Don't sneak up on us like thaaat!"

"Oh crap, I think she heard me... please say she didn't hear me..."

"No, but her pet seems to have-"

"Hello, Hiccup! Now come here, and I'll pay you back for dropping me last time we flew back at Berk!"

"Toothless, you traitor! HEEEEEEEEEEEEELP!"

The other senshi watched Tuxedo Mask and Sailor Moon charge off into the distance, Mask barely staying ahead of the huge impacts of the Moon Axe.

"Well... it could be a trial separation?"

"What, head from body? She isn't aiming to miss."

* * *

><p>Loop 28<p>

* * *

><p>Toothless flared his wings, cancelling the upwards motion, then flipped into a hard dive towards the monstrous dragon on the shore. About halfway there, he pulled out of the dive and Hiccup jumped, letting the momentum of the dive add to gravity.<p>

The Rider began concentrating chakra into his fist; it was the easiest such power to work with, but this would be a tricky one.

'Muscles, bones, skin, ligaments, tendons, cartilage, blood vessels, blood, fat, hair...', he ran through the mental checklist in his mind as he dropped towards the greatest dragon any Viking had seen in recent history.

'Now for the payoff', he thought, carefully twisting for the impact even as he felt Toothless circling nearby, ready to recover him afterwards.

* * *

><p>Stoic the Vast watched in a disbelief that, had he known it, was becoming almost commonplace around Berk for the non " loopers, as Hiccup cried out and smashed his fist into the Queen.<p>

The Queen was pushed not only hard into the beach, but through the top layers and into the bedrock a good few feet by the single impact. It was clear that it was permanently damaged, even had it survived.

"Astrid."

Astrid turned to the chieftan of her tribe. "Yes, Chief Stoic?"

"You don't seem as surprised as anyone else. Tell me, have you seen him use this 'Falcon Punch' before? Him practicing it, perhaps?"

Astrid answered by pointing to the dragon she was riding, one that had been trying to kill her not three days ago - at least as far as the rest of the Hooligans knew. "He seems to make a habit of doing surprising things, and this is no different."

* * *

><p>Loop 29<p>

* * *

><p>'Well... This is new.'<p>

Hiccup was standing in the centre of a charred circle of grass, surrounded by every student at his new school.

Or rather, her new school. This sort of thing was just annoying.

* * *

><p>"So, there are HiME with powers over elements, you think mine is fire, and each one has a CHILD that protects and helps them? That accurate?"<p>

"Yes, though it's a bit more complicated than that..."

"Whatever. Now, how do these Children show up? Their own free will?"

"No, you summon them. Simply call their name."

"Okay. TOOTHLESS!"

"What kind of a name is-!"

The enormous phoenix dragon biomech materialized in a burst of flame, and hovered overhead. The air blurred as another school member activated her own power and masked the event on almost no notice.

"Hi, Toothless." _Anything to say?_

Thith Thord in my mouth really hurtth.

...why are you lisping?

Comedic effect. Now, what's the plan?

Basically, any battle, I summon you, you nuke the enemy.

Sounds good. It's really boring in that other reality where I wait.

* * *

><p>The demonic Orphan stared down at Hiccup.<p>

"Toothless!"

* * *

><p>The Japanese Army approached the Academy.<p>

"Toothless!"

* * *

><p>A single squirrel stood in Hiccup's path.<p>

"TOOTHLESS!"

The dragon/phoenix materialized and looked down.

...Seriously?

Getitgetitgetitgetitaaaah!

Why are you terrified of squirrels?

A very traumatizing loop involving Jinchuuriki Doreen Green, Lina Uchiha, Astrid Haruno and myself as their Jonin - sensei. And Wade Wilson as Momochi Zabuza.

...ouch. Why didn't you get me to help?

That was the loop you slept off after nearly exploding trying to fight the Green Death with a single massive fireball.

* * *

><p>Loop 30<p>

* * *

><p>You really need to clean this out sometime.

"Oh come on, it's not like there's too much stuff in there."

..._Rider, there are entire spaceships in here._ Toothless' head - currently about a foot long - appeared to pop out from inside Hiccup's coat, really using the Subspace Pocket Hiccup used to carry

things between loops. All that was needed was that the hole in space not be apparent.

"Everything in there could be useful at some time or other."

Manticoran pinnacle?

"Spaceflight."

Stolen Hyounmaru?

"... Research."

Right. Ornamental tea set from the Meiji period?

"Okay, I admit it, I'm a pack rat. Happy now?"

* * *

><p>Loop 31<p>

* * *

><p>Cupxich, the number 7 Nobody in Organization XIII, really wondered about their naming procedure as he spun the chakram he'd materialized a minute ago on the end of his finger. This was really an interesting loop apart from that, though. True, he was on the villain's side, but then what else was new? That happened about one in three fused loops.<p>

No, his main concerns now were why all this seemed familiar... and where was Toothless?

* * *

><p>"Oh, good, you remember me this time. Good for you, I know what remembering things after a long time not being able to is like, done it myself.
Now, if you'll excuse me-" _oh, crap, this better work, hope I was right_ "TOOTHLESS!"

A huge fiery being, shaped of blue flame and rather draconic, appeared in front of the replacement Flurry of Dancing Flames and began to give Roxas a lesson in why not to assume that your opponents aren't looping too.

"I was right! This _is_ just like the HiME universe!"

* * *

><p>Loop 32<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup had only been in this world a few minutes and already he had met someone else who was Looping - the anchor for this universe, in fact - who seemed interested in meeting someone new to join them in this particular Loop.<p>

"So you're an Anchor, too, I'm guessing? Hi, my name's Matsuki

Takato, remember, the family name goes first, you don't look like your origin Loop was Japanese."

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the third, pleased to - oh, come on! Don't laugh, it's traditional where I come from for people to have names meant to be able to scare off trolls!"

Takato forced himself back into a standing position. "Trolls exist?"

"Yeah, they steal your left socks. I actually found them one loop. Never went within a mile of the place again. So, what's the gimmick of this Loop?"

"Heh, well, guess I'd better explain all the Digimon Linked Loops to you, as this is your first time in one. Right?"

"Sounds like it, never heard of a 'Digimon' before."

"Okay, there are four Looping universes in this thing, linked recognisably by the presence of a 'Digital World' as a side dimension parallel to the real and closely connected with the technology of Earth. In the first of the Loops (we call it the first because Taichi, their Anchor, was the first to Awaken) there is an incredibly strong time dilation factor at first, though that weakens later. The 'Digidestined' are humans - and, of course, the Anchor is one - who are linked by fate-

Hiccup snorted.

"Yeah, yeah, I know, but do you have a better term? Anyway, they're linked with a Digimon, the thing that catalyses them through the inevitable transformation sequence. That's the case on all the Digimon Loops, though less so in the third. In the first Loop, the pair are usually linked to a single virtuous emotion, such as courage, sincerity or hope, that acts as the primary catalyst. The strongest such link is signified by a Crest with a symbol on it," - Takato pulled out something on the end of a lanyard that carried a symbol of three triangles facing away from a larger one - "that combines with the interfacing Digivice to allow the Digivolution."

"Is it me or are these people getting obsessed with the term 'Digi'?"

"Yeah, laugh it up, lanky. You don't know what it's like having a place like that as your home Loop, Taichi went mad for a while when he started. ANYWAY, the third one is distinct because the people in it can sometimes turn into Digimon instead. Let me tell you, the main Looper from that one is a creepy bastard now. Wants to have every form possible in his options, but he keeps getting Macross or Gundam fused loops, and can't get the forms he wants. Now the fourth, that one's a bit different. Raw emotion makes you and your partner more powerful there. Daimon Masaru, the Anchor, he's the scariest of the lot. He once used the basic form of his partner to destroy a God's full power state and then punched out it's dormant one so it died."

"So? I punched out a hill - sized dragon once."

"That was before he started looping. Seriously, he's the only person I've known who took a Gurren Lagann Loop completely in stride from day one."

* * *

><p>Hiccup was lost for words for the next few minutes, as the two climbed up the factory complex, Takato seeming to know unerringly where they were going. As he should, it was his home Loop, after all.<p>

"So, what's unique about this Loop version?"

"... card games, okay! We influence our partners through something hacked out of a card game, and never have I been more relieved than when I didn't need to swipe the cards anymore!"

"Woah. O-kay, sore point... Any other methods?"

Takato was calmer now. "Yeah, after a certain point emotions once more become significant instead. When you have a really strong link, so the two of you think as one being, you can Biomerge and - well, what do you think that means? We can all do it more or less at will now, but Rika is the only one who uses it outside combat as she's the only one with a form that looks remotely human. You should get it before the end of the main combat part of the Loop."

"Okay, I think I will based on that description. So where are we going, anyway?"

"This area is where my partner first appears each time. He sort of... came to life based on a drawing I did."

"Right, that's my excuse for this loop. I literally have a metric ton of full sketchbooks in my Subspace Pocket."

* * *

><p>What was once a magical moment for boy and Digimon was now a meeting about as dull as someone getting up in the morning and meeting their roommate. Not as thrilling, thanks to the Loops. The locals were surprised at the actions of the new duo, though.<p>

"Shouldn't the two of you be more... well, less open and unafraid? I mean, this is a creature you've never seen before -"

"Don't make me laugh, please. My home Loop, I'm a dragonrider. I can remember maybe six Loops with no Toothless present in any way and even then I have a dozen of him in my mindscape. No - thirteen now. Looks like it IS an empathic bond. And I'm good at those. Biomerge!"

The flare of a transformation sequence filled the small space in the pipes on the roof, as Hiccup demonstrated that yes, synchronising your thoughts with someone is easier if you've literally replaced him for a Loop.

The four inch Rookie and the teen had been replaced (predictably) by a large, black, Night Fury shaped Mega.

"What _are_ you?"

"We refuse to think up a name that ends in 'mon', if that's what you're saying. Now, where are - got them. Astrid is with a 'Rika' and Fishlegs is with two called 'Kazu' and 'Kenta'."

"What? We've got to get them out of there! Astrid'll end up a bitchy psycho and Fishlegs'll be a complete nerd who views everything as a trading card game!"

Hiccup/Toothless looked at him, then rolled his eyes.

"Believe me, they won't 'end up' that way, they were _already like that._ Now, is there anywhere in the standard Loop for you guys that could be shortcutted with a teleporting, fire - breathing dragon?"

"Um, most of it, I think. The D-Reaper bit could be over in an hour."

* * *

><p>Loop 33<p>

* * *

><p>"As you can see, this small fire was not enough even to get it warm. The Ring must be cast back into the fires of Mount Doom, whence it was made!"<p>

"I can handle that. Toothless, " Toothless appeared in Bag End, knocking over the tables, "here, firestone. Now, torch that ring in the hearth, would you?"

A concentrated blast of Dragonfire heated the Ring in seconds until it was orange with heat, but Toothless stopped and expelled the rest of the Firestone breath out the window, carefully calibrated to knock over Fishlegs Gamgee.

"Okay, the slightly harder way, then, now that's proven to work if we need it. Mount Doom, Toothless, we're going dive-bombing."

The increasingly confused wizard watched as the black dragon vanished, taking the table, carpet, Ring and boy with it, before appearing again outside about a minute later and looking smug as a great light waxed in the south and east and a pressure was lifted from the minds of all free beings, one they had felt for so long they did not quite know it had ever not been there.

Gandalf's voice rang out. "Well, bollocks to that, then. I suppose you're going to blow up Harad next-"

"Great idea! Hey, boy, fancy going Oliphaunt hunting?"

* * *

><p>Loop 34<p>

* * *

><p>Snotlout was thoroughly confused.<p>

He remembered the dragon attack where Hiccup had claimed to have shot down a Night Fury, and then his cousin's gradual transformation from a pathetic scrap into... well, a more knowledgeable pathetic scrap. Then had come the Night Fury, the sailing of the fleet, the wonderful experience of flying on a dragon and the somewhat less enjoyable Green Death, Berk full of Dragons and several years more of growing up further, becoming as great a warrior as his father and finally becoming the right hand man of Hiccup, just as their fathers had been.

And now he was back at the dragon attack again, everything back to how it was those many years ago.

Was this some trick from Loki? Or a gift from the All-Father, so he could help Hiccup save his leg - maybe even, if he acted quickly, prevent Toothless from losing his tail fin, but that might mess things up even worse...

It was too tough for any Viking to deal with.

Maybe, based on that, he should just tell the man - _boy, _he was still a boy at the moment - and see what Hiccup decided. He still had about fifteen minutes before the important shot, so he had the time to let Hiccup think it through. Maybe he'd be able to go after putting out the fires...

* * *

><p>After wasting several of those precious minutes on firefighting, he realized he only had a little time left. Based on his memory of the fight and what Hiccup had told him, Toothless flew around for a few minutes starting around now - wait a minute...<p>

That was the Nightmare Stoic had smacked about with his hammer in his own stories! Snotlout began running the saga over in his mind. It was amazing, like watching the tale of Beowulf and the Dragon right there before his eyes.

But something was off. Sagas were Viking; short on plot, long on gory details, and he could swear that that hammer had struck more times than it should have, even more than the number of times Stoic had said it was on his most boozy nights.

So where was the screech, the boom, the great bolt of blue fire? Nowhere. In fact, the Nightmare was starting to look vaguely impatient between being used as an 'Executive toy' by the aptly named Stoic the Vast.

Screw it; he'd go ask Hiccup what he should do.

* * *

><p>"Hi, uh, Hiccup?"<p>

"I still say that if we use the red paint it has a measurable effect on the speed!"

"Gobber, that only works if you think it will. Nobody's going to fall for that."

"My apprentice of these many years, I would like to remind you of something very important. The people who are going to use this are Vikings. They believe in a lot of very silly things. Like that the best way to handle a clumsy, out of place, scrawny lad in a Viking village is to make him a blacksmith's apprentice!"

"... right, point taken, where's the crimson paint?"

"Hiccup! Can I ask you something, please?"

Hiccup looked round, having finally noticed him standing there. "Oh, hey, Snotlout, what's up?"

"I need to ask you something. Something... important. Private."

"Okay. Hey, Gobber! Can you go off and hit some Nadders with a hammer for a bit, please?"

"Okay, Hiccup." The blacksmith switched his 'work hammer' for a 'battle hammer' and stumped over to the door. Turning, he demanded, "Stay put. There, preferably, though anywhere you don't burn down the island is good."

"That was one time!"

"Really? I counted at least three."

Hiccup turned from the door before smiling nervously at Snotlout. "So, what was it?"

"Hiccup," Snotlout was unusually serious, "Would you be willing to become accepted by the village and a hero if it meant losing your leg?"

Hiccup stared at him in shock for a moment, before shaking his hand in a vice-grip. "Snotlout! You're finally Awake! Is this the first time round again for you?"

"Er, what? You know about this stuff?"

"Yeah, so I presume this is your first time back, right?" At the larger teen's nod he continued, enthusiastically, "Great! It took eight Loops for Gobber to admit to us he was in them!"

"Really, so he thought he was the only one too? Classic! What set it off?"

"He became suspicious that we were Looping as well when we showed up as pirates to the first training day. All of us - well, all of us in the Loops. Me, First Mate Astrid, Gunnery Officer Fishlegs and Steersman Toothless, and Bluebell joined in as a very large parrot. When Fishlegs' Buzzard was let out - I think Gobber was basically on autopilot then - he landed next to him and the two 'fired a broadside' and blew the training dome up."

"Hah! Awesome. So... Toothless... He remembers you?"

"Everyone after Toothless started remembering who joined did so as a Dragon and Human pair. We're actually running out of genuinely scary and non - partnered dragons to scare the twins with, so Toothless has to repaint himself a lot. We actually fit the Big Death in one of the doors once, they - and, uh, you - ran off the cliff and Toothless and Bluebell saved you. Now, Gobber has a plan for later this Loop that I like the sound of. Beating the Death with a mechanical version of itself."

"Sounds fun, so that's what you were arguing about?"

* * *

><p>Hiccup watched with resignation as the Village burned. Next to him, Sparklout, Snotlout and Toothless made the appropriate 'Ooh' and 'Aah' sounds as the Big Red Stompa of Death pulverized Berk with explosives, fire, particle cannons and sheer weight.<p>

Hiccup turned to Toothless and Snotlout.

"I blame the two of you for this, you encouraged him!"

* * *

><p>Loop 35<p>

* * *

><p>"Very well, Bosun, please get those reports to me by the end of the next standard day."<p>

"Of course, Captain."

Hiccup Harrington, Commander in Her Majesty's Royal Manticoran Navy and Master and Commander of HMS Fearless (and currently senior officer on Basilisk Station through no fault of his own), sighed with relief as the last appointment of the day left the cabin. Adapting to being a naval officer was hard, even if he'd been one - or something similar - in "Temeraire" loops a couple of times. Nothing had been quite so weird then as a British Dragoncorps Captain and a Celestial showing up on Berk, though. They'd mislabelled him as a Thunderdrum for days...

"Okay, Toothless, that seems to be everything. Now, why have you been in a snit for the entire Loop thus far?"

I don't get to fly.

_"I know, I can feel it through the link. Speaking of which, is it me or are you getting other people's emotions as well as a Treecat?"

Yes. In fact, what I remember from that vast fiction stockpile you grabbed in the Trek Loop about this one is that that empathy will eventually bleed over to you as well. That, and you need to be a really spectacular Captain/Admiral further down the line.

"Actually, I have an idea about that... Now, there are several

consolations, including the big one. You have opposable thumbs now, more than me in fact."

Bah. And, based on that idea I just got a sense of? You have one nice ideas machine in your brain.

"...That's a weird way of putting it."

Blame knowing Ayanami. Or Shan Pu. Luna Lovegood? Someone_ must have corrupted me._

* * *

><p>"I'm telling you, there's something weird about him."<p>

"What, the 'Salamander'? Of course there is. He brings people home when nobody else could!"

"No, seriously. Everyone who's ever served under him in combat knows it, even if none of them normally mention it. Like everything they do is perfect when he's in command. Like everyone knows what everyone else is doing."

"Pshah, that's probably mostly propaganda. The Conservative Association never liked him, and since he managed every 'Let's kill off the Salamander' mission they send him on they're trying to get to him politically instead. That duel was bad enough, but they can't attack someone who's a Count and a foreign head of state _openly_."

* * *

><p>Manticore's Gift accelerated out of Grayson orbit, flanked by the five other SDs of the Grayson Home Fleet and screened by thirty or so cruisers and a passel of DDs.

Hiccup sat in the command chair on the flag bridge, breathing deeply and evenly. This wasn't going to be easy even with the advantages the Loopers had over normal humans, but Hiccup had seen this done - and had done it - before, and this 'trick' he was using to win battles without the advantage of tactical and strategic brilliance verging on precognition only required a sharp mind and lots of power, not necessarily having recently slept, and with Toothless there to sharpen it their influence could affect the entire fleet at damn near full blast.

Okay, we're closing in. Time.

Agreed, Rider.

* * *

><p>Thomas Theisman and Shannon Foraker watched on the tac plot as the Grayson fleet closed on the Havenite BB task force, too late for the BBs to dodge, and began to shred them with missile and energy fire.<p>

Shannon was muttering to herself. "That's not right... they're adjusting their formation _faster_ _than_ orders can possibly be going out, yet it's happening in perfect sync. This isn't individual

initiative, Skip, it's more like every one of them knows what every other one is about to do."

"Watch the language, Shannon..." Theisman muttered, hoping to steer his most competent staff member away from slipping up too often and using elitist terms to refer to crew members - lest the Citizen Commissioner notice. She had a point, though... what was that damnable man doing?

* * *

><p>Hiccup felt a savage grin overtake his face as his half dozen SDs smashed the entire BB formation of over thirty without a single casualty in return, the huge, cumbersome ships practically dancing as the missiles and beams howled past.

Man, but battle meditation boosted by a pair of strongly empathic Loopers rocked!

_And for our next trick... What about dealing with the Mesan _bloody Alignment? It _would_ only take two weeks..._

_Okay, fine, dear heart. We can deal with the Mesan Alignment. What do you think? Make'em paranoid that an actual alien race is showing up and plans to destroy them and only them? Or just let Beowulf know what they've been doing? Who knows, the League might actually do something when it's proven that the Mesans are halfway to chemical mind control and have actually bred humans not only as slaves but as _politicians..._

Recruit Victor Cachat. He's always great fun.

* * *

><p>Loop 36<p>

* * *

><p>"Right, welcome to Dragon Training, Ruffnut, Tuffnut, Astrid, Snotlout, Fishlegs, Hiccup and Lina Inverse, who's apparently new, not that I'd know, I'm only the blacksmith."<p>

Hiccup's head jerked to the side. _Oh Thor no._

"Hiiii! I'm suure I'll be able to deal with the dragons!"

Crap, it is her! Toothless, get Buzzard, Sparklout and Bluebell out of here!

Gobber, oblivious to exactly what this new Looper was like, continued his spiel to the faint backdrop of several 'wooshes' of equalizing air and concluded with the bit about "learning on the job" just as Terry received the news and, completely disregarding the need for concealment, _between_-jumped to his bonded human and finally got his attention by biting him on the ear, before dumping the details of Lina Inverse into Gobber's mind.

Gobber flinched violently, released the Zippleback as the only Dragon left in the cages at this point and ran towards the other Loopers, shouting "Quick, get Toothless to get us out of here!"

Lina didn't notice the large black, blue and red dragons _between -
_jump in, evacuate the testing area and jump out again, as her focus
was on the two - headed Zippleback normally known as Sparky and
Smoky.

_"Darkness beyond twilight. Crimson beyond blood that flows. Buried
in the stream of time is where your power grows. In thy great name, I
pledge myself to conquer, all the foes who stand, before the mighty
gift bestowed in my unworthy hands. Let the fools who stand before me
be destroyed, by the power you and I posses: Dragon Slave!"_

Berk, the Zippleback, and much of the surrounding shallower seas were
reduced to a vast, steaming crater in the ocean, visible even from
the volcano on which the Loopers (and the twins) stood, it being the
closest place at least reasonably likely to survive.

Gobber turned to the oldest Loopers.

"Next time, pay more attention the first few days of a Loop! That was
not fun!"

"Look, Gobber, even if we had spotted her earlier, she's the sort of
person who explodes every new Loop at least once just to test if
Dragon Slave works there - despite the fact it _always does_ - and
at least we got out fast enough that we're not in an Eiken Loop,
right?

* * *

><p>Loop 37<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup had seen a large proportion of the ways the Multiverse
could throw "Large, Draconic and Scaly" at him, so it was
understandable that he was also used to recognizing those ones that
appeared around Berk. Not this time, though.<p>

"Toothless? Do you know anything about this? Because I don't remember
'Giant, slim, black with pink underbelly, evil dragon - that breathes
wind, shadows, poison and pure fear - and has a metal tail tip'
before. Well, at least not speaking to us about how we should all
submit to her!"

Toothless remained silent.

"Toothless?"

_I met her once in a Loop you weren't in. She's called Cynder - spent
most of the first part of the loop running away from her. She wasn't
as evil after that - she sorta shrunk or returned to her real age
or... something. When I saw that she'd replaced the Grey Death-_

"So it _has_ been you doing all those 'the Death flattens Berk'
loops! I knew it!"

_I never said _that.

"Fine, fine. At least this is a new _way_ for Berk to be

destroyed."

The two watched as hurricane force winds blew the entire village into the sea, at least until a gigantic _cheiromallista_ from the Blacksmith's hut flattened the pair of them and the Loop ended.

* * *

><p>Loop 38<p>

* * *

><p>Stoic the Vast turned towards the sound of his son's voice, expecting it to be like the last time the lad had been out in a raid, Hiccup running for his life from some Gronckle or Nadder that decided to try and off him.<p>

Instead he saw Hiccup repeatedly kicking a Nightmare in the chin, forcing it into the air, whereupon he took a stance, exploded with light and cried out something that sounded like 'Morning Peacock'...

And then punched the dragon several hundred times in a few seconds, with fists that were on fire.

Stoic wondered what he was paying Gobber, and decided it wasn't enough - or possibly too much, if Gobber hadn't bothered to teach _him._

Hiccup landed gracefully and brushed himself off, as the Nightmare, thoroughly on fire and not in a good way, smashed into the one intact catapult on the wall defences and destroyed it.

Hiccup looked sheepish. "Sorry... Dad... but this sort of thing always happens, y'know?" _Next time, I'll try something less destructive. Like a sixty - four palms strike? Maybe just learn the _chidori_ and call it the 'Thor fist' or something. Must minimize collateral damage..._

Hiccup was interrupted as Stoic swept him into an embrace. "Nice work, Son."

"Yeah, Dad, if I need to beat up dragons with my bare hands for your approval, this might not work. Not with my new pet cat, anyway."

You know I'm better than a cat. No hairballs.

Fireballs instead?

...shut up.

* * *

><p>Loop 39<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup reached for the weapons on the rack, and selected an ornate hammer that Gobber had prepared for him.<p>

Let's see that Nightmare (a replacement for the now rather more docile Sparklout, watching from overhead) try and kill him now, with an honest - to - Odin Thunder Hammer ready for him!

Right, if he's got the Power Fist ready by next Loop we'll try that as well. Maybe then I should just break out the lightsaber.

* * *

><p>Loop 40<p>

* * *

><p>"So, how's learning to shapeshift going?"<p>

Sod off.

"Oh, come on! It shouldn't be that hard, I mean, you got that size shifting ages ago! That's how we did the 'Berk likes Dragons but still not me' Loop last time, you just went forty feet long and got the resident Death in a headlock!"

Harder to do more than just change size. I'm trying to grow entire limbs here, you of all people should know what that feels like! Remember the Second Stage Transformations with Tailed Beast me chakra? Or the Animagus accident where you had wings for a week? Or-

"The wing thing was pretty cool. Might try that again sometime."

Ask Shinji about Splicing - he'll know how.

"You could try to reintegrate the fragment of you that I got when in that Loop where I was a lycanthrope, I mean that one's a shapeshifting Dragon of sorts. Might help."

* * *

><p>"Okay, got it?"<p>

Yes, actually. No more loops stuck as an owl or something ridiculous! Only works between Dragon forms and what I've been forced into that Loop, weirdly.

"Maybe we should celebrate next 'Berk likes Dragons' Loop by going all-up Night Fury on them? Or get benefit from the fact that you can now _between_jump entire spacecraft in an Honorverse loop?"

Nah, I'm going to scare the crap out of your Dad by pretending to be the Ghost of Dragons Past. Want to help?

"...Yeah, okay. I'll do the special effects."

* * *

><p>Loop 41<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup looked around. He was in a forest, and nobody else from the magical college his memories mentioned was anywhere near enough to see or hear.<p>

Toothless, any information?

Toothless' mental voice came back. _Hang on a second, I actually started the Loop as a werewolf in wolf form; need to shift before coming over to you. There we are._

Toothless, at only about a foot, appeared from _between_ and flew up Hiccup's sleeve.

Okay, give me the info and I'll see if it's a fiction in another Loop.

Magical college, this is one of two nations, apparently this is the day people get their familiars.

Summoned?

No, just whatever they find in the woods.

Okay, got it. Wow, this one's a bit obscure. Looks like it'll be fun, though. Apparently, the familiar bond spell isn't intended to work on sentient creatures, but does if they're still animals, and has the benefit that the familiar gets to cast spells too if he's sentient. In the original, Reemah - that's you - got a werewolf familiar called Barak and they were very awesome when not trying to kill one another.

So, what are our options?

Basically, do you want werewolf - pretending - to - be - a - wolf me as a familiar, fire lizard size me or a full size Night Fury familiar?

Tricky choice. Let's go with full size.

* * *

><p>The other trainee mages had all arrived back at the college and were cooing over their own or others' new familiars when they noticed the prodigy lightning mage's magical signature on the way back. Someone commented that he probably got something tiny and was upset, but that joke died as they saw Hiccup fly in on the back of a huge dragon, riding with no saddle or safety harness. It was clear that the dragon was a familiar.<p>

Hiccup slipped off Toothless' back, gave him a scratch, then turned to the shocked teachers. "What? I did what you asked."

* * *

><p>Loop 42<p>

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><p>Hiccup was back at Berk.<p>

Only difference was, this time he was about eight.

Toothless was, at this point, about half grown and only able to travel to Berk by teleport, but then again this did present a possibility. Toothless would gradually reduce the number of raids and encourage the dragons to fish instead, while Hiccup would... redesign his image.

He ostentatiously spent a few weeks making a slim dagger to exacting standards, inlaid with runes, engraved with dragons and symbols...

Then quietly threw it in the sea, released his zanpakuto and pretended that the resultant dagger that shot flaming bolas was what he had been making all along.

Astrid, Fishlegs and Snotlout did similar things once they realized all of them were present together, and the children decided to just try the brazen approach.

* * *

><p>"I can't believe that worked."<p>

"Well, Astrid, you four are young and foolish this Loop, so the most obvious explanation for four Viking kids to turn up using dragons as horses is that they did, indeed, just find the dragons and try it out - just as you said."

"So, what's your excuse for Terry, then?"

"...Experiment in furnace - lighting. Saves on matches."

Snotlout looked slightly worried. "You know, I never thought I'd say this, but man are we Vikings dumb."

"Totally. This is the lamest excuse we've tried since the Ninja Dragons loop."

Snotlout looked up eagerly. "Tell me more, I must have missed that."

Hiccup grinned. "All the Looping dragons basically turned up in the relevant houses and disappeared without a trace if people made a fuss, only to reappear the next day. Bluebell looked really bizarre in a black jumpsuit, and nobody commented when Toothless really didn't need one."

"Well, at least we've moved up the timeline by six years or so, so hopefully the Death will be up shortly. Anyone got an idea we haven't tried yet?"

Astrid's reply was to look faintly embarrassed and summon her version of Raising Heart from a subspace pocket. "We could just blow it up with a Divine Buster."

"...Where did you get that?"

"For some reason I get all the Magical Girl Loops. I think I even

have a pair of ice shooting pistols somewhere from the disaster that was the last HiME Loop. Remember, the one where you tried to Gattai with Toothless?"

"... we agreed never to mention that again, damn it! Next time I try that, I use a nice, safe Biomerge."

* * *

><p>Loop 43<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup the sorcerer looked at the rest of his party. From one viewpoint their motley group was a bit pathetic for FaerÃn, essentially consisting of an artificer, an axe fighter, another axe fighter, a hammer fighter and him, the sorcerer.<p>

From another they were going to win any adventure they were sent on. Dragons are a great bonus piece of equipment.

"Hmmm, should we take the adventure that leads to the Luskan border, or the one that requires us to defeat a grand demon of pure ice?"

"Let's go with the one that means the pansy demon melts in seconds! I swear, the other adventurers won't know what hit them!"

* * *

><p>Loop 44<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup faced his greatest challenge yet. Through a combination of poor planning and Astrid Testarossa, Fishlegs Scrya and Snotlout Hayate thoroughly messing up this Loop, he had to fight all of the Numbers at once. Even he, with the knowledge of the Loops, couldn't manage to be in that many places at once, not without spreading his mind too thin to participate in the kind of freeform nuke tennis that battles tended to be in the Nanoha Loop.<p>

Or at least, _he _couldn't, he thought, a smirk playing across his face.

* * *

><p>"Right, I want all of you to line up in alphabetical order of original Loop purpose - yes, and you - look, you each get a fish, okay!"

The flock of Toothless inhabiting Hiccup's mind instantly settled into a line, neatly arranged in the specified order.

"Right. Animagus, Bijuu, CHILD, Device, Digimon, Familiar... ...Zanpakuto. Okay, that's all of you, have your fish you greedy little beggars. Now be ready for this, okay? I'm about to draw each of you into a chakra - mana composite construct that should let you access all of my applicable powers without eating my reserves too fast. Basically a sort of Summon. Each of you has to go after the

specified target.

"Animagus form goes after Uno, CHILD Toothless is assigned to Due, Bijuu is going for Tres, Device you're staying with me, Digimon aspect after Quattro..."

* * *

><p>"You're not going to go free, Scaglietti!"<p>

"Oh, this is interesting. The green demon after me, personally. Well, too bad for you, but you're already too late to stop me! All my lovely Numbers have been sent on their missions, and they will complete my purpose irrespective of if I survive. Besides, I have myself backed up, so it's not as if a mere S+-ranker could interrupt my rightful ascension to a god among men!"

"Actually, about that, where is your nearest Number? Because I don't want to be looking in that direction in a few moments."

"You don't even know that? TSAB certainly has slipped in the last few years. But I'll humour you - Wendy, Number 11, is behind where you're standing right this instant-"

A vast flash of light, almost blinding even at eighty kilometres distance, illuminated the face of Jail Scaglietti as he realized that yes, this youngster of a mage in front of him had just timed Wendy's defeat to the second, with an attack that looked like that very same Starlight Breaker the mage was known for, at that range and facing. In fact, was it possible that the question had just been to increase the effect of that demonstration?

And then the other Numbers reported in near - chorus that they too had been defeated. By a large black dragon wielding a Device (in its' mouth and/or paws, apparently) just like the one that the mage was carrying in front of him.

Hiccup lifted Raising Dragon in front of him, and removed the cartridge feed, replacing it with a chunky belt reminiscent of a machine gun ammo feed.

"Now then, mister Scaglietti, we're about to see if you can be Befriended hard enough to propel you into the moon!"

* * *

><p>Loop 45<p>

* * *

><p>"Tsukuyomi."<p>

Itachi was eaten in seconds by Hollow Toothless, who had barely beaten Bijuu Toothless out for the honour.

* * *

><p>"Amaterasu."<p>

Sasuke watched as his fires washed off the back of the white and red

wolf that had just appeared in front of Hiccup.

Someone call my name?

Toothless, don't taunt the psycho.

* * *

><p>"Susanoo."<p>

Susanoo materialized, and lasted only a few seconds before Toothless set his spiritual bow and sword on fire. Then the demonic warrior ran away to save his Sake jug.

* * *

><p>"Kamui."<p>

Toothless and Hiccup disappeared into the wormhole of Kamui, and _between_jumped out eight seconds later.

"Come ON!" shouted Tobi/Madara, from a nearby tree. "Does ANYTHING the Sharingan does work on you?"

"Not really, no."

* * *

><p>Loop 46<p>

* * *

><p>"Behold, my Six Paths. Six ninja, each a specialist in one art, all able to see what the other sees... This is the true power of the Rin'negan."<p>

"That's nice, I guess. Only..."

Deva Pain narrowed his eyes. "Only what?"

"Well, I think I might owe you copyright on this technique, if you already had something similar._ Go-jin Ryu Naguru no jutsu!_"

Pain's eyes, all seven pairs counting Nagato, widened as one as over a dozen dragons - apparently fifteen, from the technique name - swarmed his Paths and started blowing them up. Deva Pain deflected the first with Shinra Tensei, but five seconds of cooldown between gravity attacks led to him being set on fire. Repeatedly.

The rest of the paths fell to sheer weight of numbers as the main Toothless and Hiccup watched from the sidelines.

That name isn't working for me. Fifteen dragon strike?

Fine, fine, I'll just call it in English next time. Call it something like dragon horde? Dragon strike?

What about Dragon flock?

We'll see.

* * *

><p>Nagato was later recovered from the tower and forced at Toothlesspoint to resurrect everyone who had died in the massive Shinra Tensei that had destroyed Konoha. He was understandably bitter about it all, but at least Hiccup was able to supply sufficient extra chakra that Nagato didn't have to suicide to bring them all back.<p>

* * *

><p>Loop 47<p>

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><p>"She won't wake, you know."<p>

Hiccup looked up from Ginny's body, already dragging it to the side of the Chamber, out of the way. "Oh, I know. You, the Horcrux trying to take over her soul, need to be defeated soon or she dies. However, I propose a wager."

Riddle looked dazed. "You know I'm a -"

"Yeah, pretty obvious really. Even the necessary death matches up, and you were from the 'house of bastards' and never showed up after leaving Hogwarts, so that means a name change, and- well, an anagram? Really?"

"What kind of wager, then, son of blood - traitors?"

"Oh, a Reptile Rumble, of course. All this is going over the school PA system, and I bet Fred and George are already collecting bets."

"You have no such beast! Only your tiny little familiar there!"

"Actually, Toothless here is under the effect of a lot of magic, and he'll be able to kick your basilisk all over the place in a few minutes. Now, summon the basilisk or must I do it for you?"

While Riddle summoned the basilisk from the great statue, spitting the words in rage, Hiccup fitted a pair of IR goggles - or magical equivalents hacked together with about a dozen different spells and some house paint - over his own eyes and another on Toothless, before setting the foot long dragon on the ground

Hopefully the goggles would protect them from the eyes.

That hope was borne out a second later, as the Basilisk looked straight at the pair of them, who met its' gaze unflinchingly.

"Ready, Tom?"

Tom smirked, the same cocky expression all Slytherins with half a brain appeared to have been issued on the first night. "Almost. But I have just one spell to cast first. Finite Incantato!"

The hugely potent Dispel flashed across the chamber, and caught Toothless in the snout.

Dispelling the 'lot of magic' - one big shrinking charm with the juice to last at least another year.

"And that," Hiccup commentated for the crowd over the growls, hisses, thuds and small explosions, "Is why you should always check _what_ you're about to dispel."

The basilisk lasted three minutes. Two minutes forty seconds of skirmishing, one lunge, one bite, and fifteen seconds being rendered into soup by Toothless wearing a one tail Chakra Cloak, fixing the poison as a side effect.

To add insult to injury, Hiccup destroyed the diary by giving it to Toothless - still in one tail form - as a treat for a job well done.

Slytherin house almost universally lost all their money that day, for betting on the wrong reptile. Served them right for not remembering the incident with the broom accident first year - something was off when a foot long dragon could carry Neville Longbottom.

Next year, Hiccup proved that Dementors explode when confronted with Dragonfire. Pity, really - his Patronus never really got a workout these days.

* * *

><p>Loop 48<p>

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><p>"Hiccup? Where are we now?"

Hiccup heard Fishlegs' plaintive voice, and looked himself over. As always, his hair and face were the same as normal, but the clothes gave him a good idea.

Oh, please...

Yes, Rider. And I've replaced old sharky himself.

Hiccup looked down, seeing the chief of Giha village below him, and grabbed the katana, flipping it round his shoulders in the way that felt so right here.

Well, if you _were_ stuck in a Gurren Lagann Loop, there were worse people to be than Kamina.

"Okay, Fishlegs, listen up. That big robot there is a Ganmen, and the little one you were taking me to see is clearly a better one! Everyone knows that the more humanlike the Ganmen, the stronger it is! So get in that Lagann of yours and teach this guy a lesson! I'll keep him busy until you're ready!"

"Uh, Hiccup? Are you okay? You seem to be behaving... differently."

"I'm in character, but not enough. Nothing is too overdone for the mighty Kamina! Now get going!"

As Fishlegs stumbled and ran for the tunnel, Hiccup turned to the gunwoman who had recently appeared next to him.

"Hey, Astrid, wanna bet that I can hold off that giant thing with only this sword for two whole minutes?"

"Is this loop really that OTT?"

"Remember Daimon Masaru when he came to Berk? The guy who punched out the Red Death on the back of a dragon made of fire?"

"Oh, god. Him. So you mean this is his home Loop?"

"No, he's a bit too subdued for that. Hey, hey, Hey, Hey, HEY! Get over here, ya big metal bastard!"

* * *

><p>True to his cocky claim, Hiccup did indeed survive for the requisite two minutes, though the merely normal steel Katana couldn't be enhanced enough by the torrents of Chakra and Reiatsu flooding it to save it from at least a few dings and scratches.<p>

Then Lagann burst through the floor and shredded the Ganmen, as per usual for the Loop.

* * *

><p>"Hello to the lot of you. I'm Gobber, chief of Littner village. That means I get first dibs on any gigantic battleships we may happen to steal over the course of this Loop - and yes, I plan on milking my position of actual authority for all that it's worth until we face the Spiral Vi-king."<p>

* * *

><p>"Let me make three things clear to you, human. First, I am commander "Toothless" Viral in the human eradication unit, Far East Theater. Second, I am as much in character as you are, so remember to tell the rest of us that. Third, that is my dinner and I will not let you take it unless you trade it for fish."<p>

* * *

><p>"We're the Black Siblings!" chorused the three teen girls and one more familiar teen boy.<p>

Hiccup shaded his eyes. "Wow, Snotlout. Never figured you'd have sisters, somehow."

A vein popped on Snotlout's forehead. "Shut up! I have as much right to be a black sibling as you have to drive that monstrosity of a Ganmen."

* * *

><p>Hiccup pulled himself back into the seat of Gurren, his Chakra Cloak regeneration already healing the wound from Thylimph's attack.<p>

Not that there was much. He'd used his Byakugan from a _strange_ Naruto loop and the knowledge of what was coming to time his dodge.

"Jeez... can't a guy get any sleep around here? Okay, Fishlegs, combine with Gurren and sit back to listen to this inspirational music. It's the speech I heard last time through. Pay attention to what I'm doing, though, you might need to do it yourself later."

* * *

><p>Hey, Toothless, after we got the battleship I retired. I'm insisting I be allowed to rest, but really that's so that you can beat up on Gurren Lagann a bit. Don't go overboard though.

* * *

><p>Toothless stood on the deck of the Dai-Gurren, looking unhappily at the utter mess that was left on the deck.<p>

It was going to take weeks to separate the three Ganmen from the twisted wreckage.

"Future reference? 'Don't go overboard' does not refer to actual overboard but instead to not doing too much damage. You can certainly jump over the side of the ship if that means you escape from Attenborough's firing arc in melee combat. Now I'll have to fight LordStoic myself."

* * *

><p>"Even when trapped by karma's cycle, The dreams we left behind will open the door! Even if the Universe stands in our way, Our seething blood will determine what will be! We will break through Time and Space! And defy all who would stop us to grab hold of our path! Tengen Toppa... GURREN LAGANN! _**JUST WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK WE ARE!**_

"Wow, you were right." Gobber added. "Going along with it is just more fun."

* * *

><p>Loop 49<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup looked at the section of his Subspace Pocket he'd been filling up this Loop.<p>

He'd decided that versatility was good, and that an actual bladed weapon Zanpakuto would help (especially alongside Kyouran) so he'd been testing spirits for compatibility.

That lucky bastard Ichigo could use any Zanpakuto at will, but he'd been reduced to lesser fare in that he could only sync with certain

very specific spirits. The condition was, mind, really obvious in nature.

'Better than some people's set, I suppose... quite a lot better.' he mused. Hyorinmaru, Minazuki, the biggest prize of all - Ryujin Jakka - and others, all in their individual rooms (and why not? their spirits could manifest and enjoy the time in between use.). Kyoka Suigetsu, it being a Li lung; Raika; hang on. What were Ulquiorra, Gattenbainne Mosqueda and Edrad Lioness doing in here?

They looked back at him icily.

"Oh, hehe, yeah... Sorry, I sort of got carried away after grabbing Ryujin Jakka and went on a sort of spree... I think my original Zanpakuto had something to do with it, he usually does..."

Don't try to pin this one on me.

* * *

><p>Loop 50<p>

* * *

><p>Reality flickered as the Loop formed, and Hiccup frowned down at the telephone in front of him. He'd never been here before, but it seemed strangely familiar...<p>

Toothless, you there?

Nothing.

Oh, yeah, got it. Evangelion, brilliant. What to do... Summon a usable form of Toothless and destroy the Angels with him that way? Or...

He grinned, as he mentally felt around in his subspace pocket for the nanoprobes given to him by Chief O'Brien and the chip carrying AI Toothless.

Unit 01 was due a little redecorating, he decided.

Now, how to get to the Geofront? He hadn't been there before, so apparition was out, and besides there was the script here that should handle it.

Right, time for a few "purchases" from the empty shops nearby. Mainly large amounts of computer equipment.

* * *

><p>The neural link snapped into place over subspace, once more connecting Hiccup with his near-constant mental companion.<p>

Hi, Toothless. Got a job for you.

Always with the work, never a moment's rest...

Hey, the AI instance of you didn't do a thing for the last ten Loops!

Fair enough. What do you want?

Lots and lots of N2 mines, a design for an EVA version of your extremely deadly self, and a feed mechanism that fires barely - coherent plasma bolts the size of a truck that detonate on impact. **Screw** the script for an Eva universe.

* * *

><p>Katsuragi didn't pay much attention to Hiccup on the car journey, except to notice that he was completely at ease with essentially any of the twists and turns the car was put through on the mad dash to NERV, even staying in the seat when the car went upside down.<p>

'Well, I suppose he _is_ supposed to be a good EVA pilot...' she had thought to herself.

Now, though, it was clear something really big was off with him. He'd climbed into the EVA alright, but he'd reached Sync ratio 130% and it had started radically changing shape and growing some bizarre extra organs (at least according to the frantic Ritsuko) until it had climbed into the launcher and somehow triggered it remotely, along with the unremarked upon extra launcher five kilometres away that, according to the MAGI, carried at least a dozen N2 mines.

Upon reaching the surface it was clear the change was complete, as the EVA flew (!) over to the other launcher and ate one of the N2 mines whole, containing the subsequent explosion in an internal AT-field.

Unit-01 then took flight again, went into a stooping dive and exploded the Angel with one shot. Apparently it had delivered the force and heat from the N2 mine inside a "toroidal self - propagating internal AT field" that meant the Angel essentially couldn't deflect or avoid it.

Gendo already looked like he was dancing on quicksand...

* * *

><p>On the Over the Rainbow, Hiccup contemplated the Loop so far. He'd been doing fairly well, all things considered... He hadn't stepped on anyone as Shinji had first time around, Fishlegs and Snotlout were running interference for him at school so he seemed to be just some weird artist, and Toothless was enjoying himself even more than usual at the prospect of being able to fly with an S2 engine (stolen from the fourth angel) for power. It still pissed off the NERV scientists how he'd done that...

* * *

><p>Unit 02 looked at the nine mass production EVAs all around it.<p>

The pilot's face turned feral, as the EVA sank into a crouch.

"Five minutes of power... Hah! No challenge, these things! Like Trolls, easy!"

The second child ripped into the MP EVAs like a wild beast... which her EVA resembled after some judicious Iruel nanite work. If anything, this Loop was worth it for the nearness to breakdown Ritsuko was at... showed what you got for thinking the laws of physics held sway around AT - fields.

Hiccup closed his eyes and smiled for a moment. Astrid was like that, so much so that her pre - Loop history as someone following Asuka's path of maximum carnage was essentially no different to the casual observer.

"Finished!"

Hiccup looked around. "Wow, already?" _Toothless, please tell me you recorded that! Nine Godmoding MP EVAs in under a minute!_

Toothless' mental voice was smug. _Every second._

* * *

><p>Loop 51 (Sorry for the different formatting)<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup had decided that, so soon after the "Quincy that sees through illusions" cheap takedown of Aizen courtesy of the Byakugan eyes and the Zanpakuto Stealing Spree, he might as well enjoy this Bleach Loop by doing something rather different. Specifically, fake up a power set consistent with the universe.
He sent a message to the Looping Ichigo he felt in the distance, essentially consisting of "Roll with it."

>Then he concentrated on the image of a stuffed toy dragon, and told Toothless to adopt the shape he specified.
Time for another kind of Ryoka for Soul Society to have headaches about...

Ishida pushed up his glasses on his nose. "Well, you see, I wouldn't normally have intervened, but I was just on my way home from shopping, and upon seeing two Shinigami, well, it would impugn my honour as a Quincy to not intervene."

>From the other side of the Squad 7 command crew came a short laugh. "Honour of the Quincy, this, Honour of the Quincy that. Jeez, Ishida, one of these days you're going to have to accept that you actually like us."
Ishida turned to the short, green-eyed boy under the next streetlamp. "That may be true. But not, unfortunately, today."

>"You're just jealous of my awesome stuffed toy of doom, Quincy."
Byakuya turned to the newcomer. Was everyone in this part of the real world insane?

>"Foolish child. How you expect to handle a Captain - level opponent is beyond me, especially with a child's toy."
"What's the matter, _Kuchiki - dono? _You seem nervous. Afraid of a little boy playing with his _doll_?"

>Abruptly, the captain saw the double meaning in the sentence. Surely not!
"_Zeige Dich, Nacht Furie!_"

>Well, he'd known this was going to be a bad day from the time his tea was slightly cooler than usual. Oh, and when he had been made to take his sister for execution, but that hardly counted...<p>

* * *

><p>Loop 52<p>

* * *

><p>Fishlegs put down the railgun he'd picked up somewhere and nodded in satisfaction as the Armoured Death collapsed to the ground with a huge hole right through its' brain.<p>

"Nice work, Fishlegs!" called Gobber from the rest of the Vikings, most of them watching in awe, some of them (those Awake in this loop) applauding.

"Points for originality and for the one liner right before you fired!"

Fishlegs face shone with his huge smile. "Thanks, dad."

There was a pause.

Hiccup, Astrid, Snotlout and half the non-Looping Vikings turned on Gobber. "He's WHAT?"

"Oh, didn't ya know? We thought it was obvious."

Hiccup snorted. "Yeah, because all Vikings resemble their parents too closely for it to be otherwise."

"Well, couldn't you at least tell from the fact we have the same last names?"

Astrid spoke this time. "Right, like we Vikings pay attention to those. I think maybe five Vikings even have last names and as I recall, you're not one of them; you replaced it with a title."

"Well... Okay, I suppose you have a point."

* * *

><p>Loop 53<p>

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><p>"Okay, screw this." Hiccup ducked a throwing axe as the Vikings began to pour into the Kill Ring. Oh, the perils of an "original" Loop path...<p>

"Shatter, Kyoka Suigetsu."

The assembled Vikings all saw the strange behaviour of Hiccup's sword, but paid it no mind.

Hiccup raised his voice. "There is no Night Fury here. I just beat the Nightmare personally with nothing but my bare hands, though I only knocked it out. You will not notice the Night Fury unless told otherwise. This does not apply to Time Loopers, you know who you are."

The Vikings looked vaguely confused at why they were entering the

Kill Ring with no readily apparent reason, but shrugged it off and began to disperse.

"Now, Astrid, shall we go and get something to eat to celebrate my passing with flying colours?"

"What did you just do?"

"Complete Hypnosis, remember that bastard Aizen from the Bleach Loops?"

"I remember him, but how-"

"Stole his sword. Got a half dozen others, too. And three resurrections, but that was an accident."

* * *

><p>Loop 54<p>

* * *

><p>Luke Skywalker fell backwards as the Sand Person menaced him with the Gaffi stick, before clubbing him into woozy consciousness with the less sharp end.<p>

Luke fell back, not knowing how to stop what was going on, as the Sand People started ripping up the hull of his Speeder to get at the delicate machinery inside. The nomads were sure to deal with him somehow, whether by killing him before they left or taking him as a slave, and the life he saw in front of him now was infinitely worse than his vague dreams of becoming a pilot, or even just being a farm boy the rest of his life.

Then a hideous sound echoed over the hills, and the sand people turned.

All they saw was an old man, one who Luke recognised through the pain and cloudy vision as the old man who lived out here, drawing all manner of fantastic things with a simple plastic rod and a lump of graphite - the picture of a hermit.

So what was he doing out here?

The old man spoke, his voice carrying despite the low volume, and somehow understandable though he spoke no language Luke knew.

"You'd better leave, or at least duck, my good fellows, or I will not be responsible for the consequences."

The sand people shouted at him in return, and one of them levelled a rifle.

Then the one who'd made the threat was blasted backwards by a bolt of blue fire from somewhere over the hillcrest.

"I did warn you. Now, the next one will-"

The sand people roared and charged... about twenty feet. Then a gigantic bolt of azure fire slashed across Luke's vision and

destroyed the charging horde.

What _was_ _that_, a photon torpedo?

The old man walked calmly up to Luke. "Here, let me help you up."

Luke didn't know what to think. On the one hand this was an old man, considered cracked in the head, with a bizarre mode of speech.

On the other hand, he could _swear_ he had a concussion a few minutes ago...

* * *

><p>At the bar, Luke had been pushed over by the criminal, and had gone down hard as his opponent lunged for him-<p>

Then that azure light appeared again, and the thug's arm was on the floor, the old man - Jedi, he remembered, which explained a lot, if not everything - was holding a small dagger in his hands with a two foot blue blade of light extended from it.

Strange, he thought a lightsaber was just a cylinder, and his certainly was... then he saw a similar cylinder hanging from the old man's belt. So he _had_ a normal saber, but this was what he went for first? Strange...

* * *

><p>Darth Vader swung his malevolent red saber in an arc at the aged Jedi - who vanished, his robes and lightsaber falling in a heap to the ground.<p>

Luke ran into the Millennium Falcon, upset about his loss, not noticing the tiny lizard in the corner of the room that paid careful attention to him.

The battle in the throne room of the Death Star was going well for Luke, who had defeated his father and was now refusing to fight him.

Though the balance shifted a second later when Palpatine proved to be able to throw lightning bolts at him.

As Vader started for Palpatine for his heroic sacrifice, three brilliant balls of fire shot out of the fused and tangled wreckage in the corner of the room and wrapped around Palpatine before exploding.

The old man, not looking any different from when Luke had known him briefly a few years before, nor than the times what had certainly _seemed_ to be his spirit had shown up, calmly walked over to the smoking Sith Lord and threw him down the reactor shaft, before pulling that same trick from years before and healing Vader - or Anakin Skywalker - to full health for a forty year old man.

When pressed about the recent events seconds later when everyone had recovered their voices, his only comment was "Manipulating time and teleporting combine well to fake one's death - and as for the

appearances afterwards? Ah, that was Soul Candy, a brilliant invention of the last few decades. Why wait until death to advise one's pupils from the spirit realm?"

"So you let me believe I'd finally beaten you, old man?"

His voice was unrepentant. "Yes. Now, hurry up and get onboard my friend here - this thing's about to explode."

Luke looked up. "You mean they've done it? The core is going to explode?"

"Well, it was protected by an amazing shield, one powered by pure dark force energy from Palpatine and of incredible natural strength. Unfortunately, a ballistic Sith shaped uncannily like the emperor just blew it up, so get on quickly, why don't you!"

Anakin got on the strange beast just after his son. "How did you escape the Death Star the first time?"

His teacher's voice was ripe with humour. "Like this."

About ten pitch black seconds later, the trio were five hundred metres above the Endor forest canopy and coming in to land.

* * *

><p>"You galactics are all alike with your veneration of technology! We Yuzzhan Vong will defeat you for our purposes are pure and our equipment lives and partners with us-"<p>

"Actually, I don't use anything electronic. And my sword that I use in place of a lightsaber has a personality. Does that count?"

Nom Arnor looked disquieted for a moment. "Really? Prove it, human!"

"O-kay! Ban-kai!"

Six crowded seconds later, Nom was flat against the floor on his back, looking into the face of the huge draconic thing the jedai had summoned from nowhere.

"Well, that seems in order. Welcome aboard..." he stuttered.

* * *

><p>Loop 55<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup looked out over the sea of faces, many of them familiar, and felt like becoming a hermit for the Loop.<p>

Seriously, would it be that bad, Toothless? None of this would intrude._

Of course it would, that's the actions of a coward. You think Harry enjoys having new faces every other Loop? Now get in there!_

Hiccup cleared his throat.

"Uh, Hi! Welcome to everyone visiting from other Loops. My name is the singularly unfortunate Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, and I am the Anchor for this Loop. The defining characteristics of this Loop are dragons. Lots of them, from the Terrible Terror that is the size of a cat and as nasty as a migraine when it goes for your nose, through my companion Toothless, who Loops with me, to the really big ones like the Death. It is the tradition of the village to hate and try to kill dragons, and it is the tradition of the Loopers here to prove them wrong by saving their hairy behinds from the Death itself within three months. So, to that end it is time for dragon training, and there is one golden rule. Nothing that would either kill off the dragon you are trying to work with or level the island entirely.

Now I'm going to be available if anyone needs help, and if a dragon appears to recognize you then be aware it may be an individual from your home Loop recast as a dragon. If this seems to be the case, get myself or one of the other Loopers for whom this is home to translate for you."

Five minutes later, a Nightmare was trying to eat Naruto and making a surprisingly good go of it despite the Fox Cloak, Nanoha appeared to be working up a really impressive Befriend on her assigned dragon judging from the fact she had loaded a third cartridge clip, Ichigo was hollowified and bonding with a Boneknapper, Yachiru had apparently found Kenpachi incarnate as a Razorwing, Shinji and Asuka were fighting over... something, possibly the last Loop, Harry was having a fluent chat with a Skrill despite his speaking Parseltongue instead of Dragonese, Wade Wilson was introducing a Whispering Death to the concept of importance to the story, and in general the chaos was total.

Apart from the small island of sanity where F'Lar and Mnementh, Lawrence and Temeraire, Twoflower and Ninereeds, and all the home Loopers watched in exasperation.

The one thing I can't work out is who screwed up badly enough for this Loop..._

* * *

><p>Loop 56<p>

* * *

><p>Astrid hovered over the volcano on Bluebell as Hiccup and Toothless rose into the air, having taunted the Red Death into following them. That was her cue, and she pressed the button.<p>

Massive speakers concealed all over the bay burst to life, playing the request Hiccup had made, and his voice rang across the bay.

"Father, understand this. The reason I disobeyed you is the same reason Toothless disobeyed the Red Death. Both you and it thought that humans and dragons could never work together, when they are greater than the sum of their parts!"

Green energy started to form around the pair as they got some distance, before turning to the sound of _Happily Ever After._

"Man and Dragon, joining their efforts to make their own future! That's the way to break through the cycle of hatred, and lead into a better tomorrow!

Giga..."

The pair went into a spin.

"**Drill...**"

The dragon and rider followed a dead flat path across the bay, straight for the Red Death.

"BREEEAKERRRRRR!"

The enormous torrent of green energy shredded the malevolent beast, shrugging aside its' fire, before burying itself in the side of the mountain hard enough to shake the earth.

Stoic gasped at the sight, before Gobber clapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't worry, he'll be fine, he's probably gone all the way through."

* * *

><p>Loop 51 continued<p>

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><p>"Right, the plan for entering Seiretei is simple," the elder Shiba explained. "We get you all to create a cannonball of Reiatsu, then we use a huge gunpowder charge to fire you at the barrier, the cannonball breaks, you get scattered all over Seiretei and presumably at least some of you will come down somewhere you can make it to where Rukia is being held - yes, what is it?"<p>

The Bount held up his stuffed toy. "Or we could just get Toothless to teleport us in."

She scowled. "Or, yes, in a pinch you could just teleport, but where's your sense of adventure?"

"Currently, dead in mysterious circumstances. My drive for survival found the body, but assures me it has a firm alibi."

* * *

><p>Chojiro Sasakibe had been surprised to find himself assigned to interception work of the Ryoka along with the other shinigami, but apparently this was due to the large size and the high average ability of the invaders, including at least two varieties of partial human thought to be extinct. He wasn't sure why that meant he personally had to participate - he was used to acting as an adjutant to the captain-commander, after all - but his Gonryomaru was making pleased comments about his finally getting to do something, which

made little sense to him. At least it wasn't moaning about his never standing out. Weren't the shades enough to make him unique, especially as Renji had broken one of his pairs and seemed determined to lose the other?<p>

Then he felt a large spiritual pressure ahead, and flipped Gonryomaru into a fencer's grip. _It's time._

"Pierce, Gonryomaru!"

The rapier formed in his grip, and as he pushed reiatsu into it the sky began to darken and rumble with thunder.

Applause rang out from a nearby rooftop, and he spun to see what it was, already pulling the charge from the environment into the blade, ready to strike.

He saw a young man on the rooftop, apparently around fifteen years of age, and called up to him. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

The apparent Royka smiled sheepishly, and replied "Well, I was trying to infiltrate the Seiretei with my stuffed toy as a guide, but I got a little lost - at least I think I did, this isn't Sokyoku hill, right?"

"...Wait, what? A stuffed toy? And how can this be a hill, there's a shadow being cast over it by the real Sokyoku hill!" 'Great. Now it turns out that some new spirit - perhaps one that met that traitor Kuchiki - has turned up inside Seiretei and not right in the head. Why did it happen to me, and why now?'

"Yeah, he's really cool! He flies and shoots fire, and everything! Show him, go on!"

Things failed to happen. The thunderstorm rumbled overhead, and Sasakibe wondered if he really had to handle this. Probably someone like Lieutenant Matsumoto could deal with someone clearly as mad as she was...

"Oh, sorry, I forgot, he only speaks German. Could you give me another go, please?"

Falling back on the apparent British reputation for politeness, Sasakibe decided to humour the Ryoka for a few more minutes before shocking him into unconsciousness and leaving him in the prison for someone else to deal with.

He would have done it already, but it just seemed polite...

He was regretting it seconds later.

"Zeige Dich, Nacht Furie!"

Hiccup ducked behind a fallen lump of roof, the ersatz Bount apparently forgotten in the face of the dragon flitting from the thunderclouds to rooftop height, lobbing lazy fireballs at the first division Lieutenant. Hiccup had a more important job to do than watch Sasakibe calling down lightning to bounce off his rapier at Toothless, Toothless flash stepping (flapping?) all over the place or

the occasional lightning spear and fireball clash.

No, he was trying to work out the Bount trick of using reishi to regenerate wounds, as that would be especially useful in Soul Society.

Sasakibe abruptly went flying past, followed by Toothless, who had apparently set himself on fire.

That's a new trick. Where did that come from?

Finally bothered to ask Sparklout how it's done, then decided to fake it up with napalm.

Hiccup walked over to the defeated Lieutenant. "Well, since you were so kind as to point out the hill properly for me, mister Britishman, I'd better be off!"

Sasakibe looked up at him. "You... actually think I'm British?"

"Yeah, you do a fairly good job of it. The attack helps too, as it makes it rain as a side effect, but really you should release earlier, give the storm time to gather."

The Shinigami was clearly touched, though he was trying to hide it as he'd heard that Britishmen were typically stoic.

"At last! Recognition!"

Hiccup smiled as Toothless shrunk back to the toy version of himself. "Glad to be of help!"

And ran off in completely the wrong direction.

Why the getting lost? You lived here for centuries.

Because this way I develop a character trait that lets other people around me do things as well. Besides, Ichigo's nearly at the steps by now, and I don't want to be anywhere near the crater one of his Getsugas is going to make Renji into.

* * *

><p>"Helloo, Kitsu-Taicho!"<p>

Sajin Komamura spun round, his face forming a snarl and his hand reaching for his zanpakuto. "Do not call me a fox! I am a wolf, damn you!"

Hiccup held up his hands. "Whoa, sorry. Didn't know it was such a sore point."

"I assume you are the Ryoka who has been observed employing powers normally associated with the Bount?"

The invader smiled openly. "Yep! Even got rid of the pesky downsides of being a Bount! Not the upsides of course, that'd be silly, but I no longer need to kill humans to stay alive!" It was true. Normally, his faux Bount powers would indeed mandate drinking people's souls in

vampiric fashion, but there was an antidote to that. Proximity to Ichigo Kurosaki.

It was the equivalent of putting a solar panel right next to the sun. Most of the energy that passed through wasn't absorbed, just enough to fuel his unusual powers, but it meant that Bount didn't have to die. Hell, right now Ichi could probably keep a horde of Adjuchas satisfied with power leak.

"Well, I am pleased to hear that, but of course I must now destroy you for invading Seireitei. I hope you understand."

"Of course! I'm glad I seem to meet polite shinigami."

"Console yourself with that. _Bankai!_"

As the iron colossus formed, the Bount seemed unconcerned at the threat of imminent death presented, not even making a move to use his powers.

"Well, child? Will you do anything, or simply surrender in cowardly fashion?"

"Why do you ask?"

"From talking with Chojiro - Fukutaicho we know the nature of your powers, and that you must release them like a shinigami. So, where is the doll?"

"Oh, right. But you don't know _all_ _my_ powers. For starters, I released him ten minutes ago and you didn't notice, so-" Hiccup continued as Toothless flashed past and ripped a salvo of fireballs at the great iron man, "-you don't know about the stealth aspect."

The fight was amusing to watch, as in trying to direct his bankai to swat _Nacht Furie_ out of the air, Komamura soon ended up looking like a man trying to handle a particularly obstinate fly.

This fight did, however, prevent Komamura from being Black Coffin'd in the everything, so it could be considered a net plus even with the embarrassment.

* * *

><p>"Hey, Ichigo, did you ever happen to pick up a Bitte during the business with the Bount?"

"I think so, why do you ask?"

Hiccup looked faintly embarrassed. "I know we're going to be facing the Bount proper in a few weeks - if that - so I thought I'd better power up somewhat. Not to mention I'll need it if we face the Arrancar, I don't fancy being completely pathetic and by now I'm committed to Bounthood for the loop."

Ichigo mused. "Could be fun... OK, here. Who are you going after?"

"Probably going to pick someone who cops it in Yammy's first

appearance. Oh, by the way, when's the Memory Rosary thing happening?"

Ichigo looked blank. "Memory... Rosary? What?"

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me... Good thing I was summoning that Loop so I had a memory backup. Every Loop, there's this thing where exile Shinigami try to destroy reality or something and the usual suspects - you know, you, Zarakii, Hitsugaya, Ikkaku, Rukia and probably a few others - paste 'em. Then everyone loses the memory because of something that doesn't make a lot of sense. I escaped thanks to having something like a dozen distinct personae in my subconscious where you have only aspects like Zangetsu and Shiroasaki. Well, mine are aspects, but they're not of me... Anyway, I'm willing to bet Naruto, Ranma, Harry and probably a good fraction of the later generation Loopers know, they must have just never bothered to tell you."

Ichigo gripped Zangetsu with white knuckles. "I swear, next Fused loop..."

"Smack the older Loopers around, don't blame us younger generationals, we all see you as basically older than time. How long is your Loop at max?"

"I once hung on until the stars burned out and no souls remained but me. Then I invaded Hell for something to do and the whole place exploded. Since then I usually end the Loop when the Earth does if I hang on for more than a millennium."

"Yeowch. And I thought Star Trek Loops were long..."

* * *

><p>Hiccup retreated through Sereitei from Yoshi, the female Bount having ripped open his arm (a wound already healing itself from environmental reiichi) and pressuring him in "attack" mode such that he couldn't even call out his own Doll. There was still a backup plan, though, he thought as he closed his eyes to hide the Byakugan, the dojutsu seeing past the lids to enable his dodging - fairly soon he should be close enough to Ishida to coordinate with him for a moment's respite.<p>

"There-CRAP! My LEG!"

Yoshi had caught him again as he jumped over the roof. Not hesitating, Hiccup raised his free hand and pushed as much reiatsu through it as he dared given his not-alive not-dead status, and was rewarded by a shimmering green spike - what happened to a Jyuuken strike that was overloaded by over twenty times - that deflected the follow up blow, and also incidentally alerted his Quincy friend to his predicament.

"Well, well, if it isn't my strange - named... acquaintance, Hiccup the Bount. What brings you to this area?"

"Oh, come on, Ishida! Can't you-" Hiccup focused and flipped into the protective eight trigrams modified Jyuuken stance, finding everything else he had too slow or too obviously non-native to the Loop - "at least show some concern when your favourite freak of

nature is in trouble?"

"Of course not!" Ishida looked offended, somehow conveying it despite being engaged in combat with a giant praying mantis. "That would _"

"Yeah, I get the picture." Hiccup backed against Ishida and the duo looked at the Bount and their dolls approaching from two directions.

"Tell you what, swap? I'll handle the insect thing and you handle miss 'attack - defend - not â€" both' there."

"Sounds good, this one is too spindly for good target practice. On three?"

"No, too easy to misinterpret. _Now!_"

Cain looked at his new opponent, both combatants enveloped with reishi from disintegrating buildings. "So, another Bount, then? I'm surprised that any Bount could turn traitor like this."

"Really, now? Remember Yoshino? That's two, and there are only what, twelve? Last time I checked, that was more of a revolution."

"True. Well, I suppose I'll have to kill you now, for interfering with our grand plan."

"Which is _what_, exactly? Go to soul society, eat buildings and be blown up - _zeige dich, nacht furie_ - by Kariya? I didn't know you were so devoted."

Cain looked suspicious. "What was that?"

"You mean the bit about Kariya plans to blow everybody up because he estranged his wife or something?"

"No, that muttering." Hiccup looked innocent.

"Oh, that's simple - people always expect you to finish before doing something. I just released my Doll and he's in a power dive."

Cain looked depressed. "_Scheisse._"

Hiccup went into a Heavenly Spin defence as the entire block exploded.

* * *

><p>"Hey, Ichigo. You go and handle Ulquiorra, I'll sort out the overgrown housecat."<p>

Ichigo nodded, and blasted off over the dunes of Las Noches, not even bothering to Hollowify himself.

Grimmjow glared at Hiccup. "And what makes you think you can handle the Sexta Espada?"

"Mainly, this. _Nacht Furie, Zweiform!_"

_ "Ooh, releasing already, human! Okay then, _Grind, Pantera!_"

When the smoke and dust cleared, Grimmjow was in his Resurrecion state, as might be expected.

Hiccup, however, was standing at least eight feet at the shoulder, covered in night-black scales, wings of the same colour flaring out behind him and holding a sword of blue fire in one clawed hand.

"Oh, yes! It's been a while since I met anyone with that kind of power!" Grimmjow was almost trembling at the prospect of the fight.

"Bring it on, pussycat!"

"Oh you are DEAD, hear me, human, DEAD!"

Ichigo felt the ground shake and the tell-tale boom of fragments of roof falling down echo over the artificial day of Las Noches.

"Well, seems like Grimmjow's getting a good workout. Wonder if the whole place'll collapse _before_ either Ulquiorra or I release?"

* * *

><p>Loop 57<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup looked up at the dragon - the Night Fury, he assumed - with eyes that held a little fear, and apprehension, but mainly wonder.<p>

He reached out - and the dragon flinched back, but not far. Again, and it growled slightly, but abated when he drew his hand back.

'So it doesn't want to - he doesn't want to - touch me after all. I suppose we're too different, Vikings and dragons, after all...'

Deciding to try one last attempt, he turned his head away and blindly reached out his hand.

A few seconds after it came to its' full extension, he was ready to give up when a gentle warmth suffused his palm, and he felt scales.

He went weak at the knees with relief, before turning incredulously to look at the dragon pressed gently, eyes closed, against his outstretched hand.

* * *

><p>Overhead, silently gliding in the thermals coming from the forest and hidden by the effects of a subtle illusion, a thirty year old Viking and his companion of immeasurably many years watched the events they knew so well.<p>

It seems strange to see him like this.

True. It's always different from the outside, isn't it.

I assume you intend to intervene at some point, Rider mine?

As I recall, things went well enough until the Nightmare fight. Would you let the others know that's when we're making a move?

Very well. Though apparently Astrid and the others are horribly embarrassed at their Prime selves.

That's their problem, we're going to fix things big time. Can you say 'coincidentally timed running battle between dragons ends with the Death blowing up in full view of Berk'?

Not without medical assistance.

Dragon thinks he's funny. Okay, we'd better go back to the hideout, I need to work on my disguise as an actual Viking.

* * *

><p>"We don't have to kill them." The younger Hiccup implored, calmly soothing the Nightmare into a relaxed state.<p>

"I said STOP THE-" Before Stoic could truly mess things up, Gobber next to him caught his hammer and twisted it out of his grip, before pointing to the Northeast.

Stoic looked to the indicated direction, only to see a huge monstrosity of a dragon barely - his breath caught in his throat. Judging from the recognizable dragons flying round it, it looked that large at least half a mile out, but that was still far too close for comfort.

Flames and explosions, and the odd unearthly scream, were evident as what appeared for all the world like a dogfight between dragons swept closer, and just as he was turning to the crowd to order them into a defensive formation, the ring was smashed in by an explosion. Out of the smoke, through the hole, the Nightmare rushed to join in the fight in the air, followed by... his son, a Terror on his shoulder, riding a dragon! Now everything made sense - well, everything he'd been puzzled about this morning made sense, but the question of why dragons were helping humans, or the one of why they were having a civil war, or for that matter the burning issue of what the Hel was going on, remained unanswered.

Though it was very impressive when Hiccup blew up the enormous foe after a crazed dogfight in the afternoon sun, that same Nightmare from the ring carefully guiding the Fury down after the tail fin Hiccup had made burned off.

A few miles away in a clearing, the Prime Loop Gobber and the Nightmare that should have been in the Ring rather than the Looping Sparklout were tied up, chained to the nearby rocks, with Fishlegs carefully explaining what had happened to those two and the Prime Fishlegs, who needed no restraint after it was explained that there would be a card game afterwards.

Always good to know your own weak points...

* * *

><p>Loop 58<p>

* * *

><p>"I have a bad feeling about this, master."

The Jedi master nodded absently as his Padawan expressed his concerns over their training link. "Don't be worried, this is supposed to be a routine trade negotiation settlement."

"_Around Loopers? Don't make me laugh."_

Hiccup-Jinn turned to his pupil, Only-one Toothnobi, and bestowed a reproving glare upon his companion. "You know as well as I do that it's best to display moderation, at least until things go south. That way, we're not accountable."

"_You realize this is Naboo, right? We're going to be attacked in minutes?"_

"Not to worry." Hiccup reassured, then elaborated over the training link. "_After all, if worst comes to worst, we can fight our way out â€" hang on."_ Hiccup looked the dragon over. "How the hell did you pass Lightsaber training? You don't have any prehensile limbs."

"_That clip on tail fin, a lightsaber, half an hour in the machine shop and a great deal of practice."_

"I suppose that makes sense. Awakening in a Loop _in media res_ is annoying, though. Now-" The pulse of death rolled over their empathic senses as their cruiser was destroyed in a pretty blatantly evil act. "Damn, here we go."

Gas hissed into the room. The two took deep breaths, held themâ€| and then Toothless sneezed.

Hiccup blinked soot out of his eyes, bits of conference table embedded in the walls. "Wow. So that stuff was flammable."

"_Sorry."_

"Right, time to go get some answers." Hiccup cracked his knuckles, lit his 'saber, and he and Toothless began devastating the battle droids on the shortest path to the command deck.

* * *

><p>"Where are those droidekas?"<p>

Rune Hako pointed at a screen, showing the enormous reptilian Jedi busily using a droideka leg to pick bits of blaster rifle from between his claws.

"Damn your incompetence! There is only one option. Evacuate that corridor to space."

Hako complied hastily, and the two Jedi went flying out into low Naboo orbit.

"_This is your fault, Master."_

Hiccup sent a mental sigh. _"Shut up, Toothless."_

* * *

><p>"Wesa give yousa una Bongo."<p>

Toothless rolled his eyes, and spread his wings to their full span.

Hiccup put a steadying hand on the dragon's shoulder. "Do you have anythingâ€| larger?"

Boss Nass considered a moment. "Wesa give yousa una Bongo, SUV model."

* * *

><p>"Perhaps we can maintain the element of surprise."<p>

Hiccup looked incredulously at Captain Panaka. "My Padawan is a twenty foot fire breathing dragon with skin that can resist plasma bolts. We don't _need_ the element of surprise."

* * *

><p>"Tatooine. It's a desert planet, ruled by the Hutts."<p>

"_Hmmâ€| no fishâ€| but handy slug shaped snacksâ€|"_ Toothless trotted off. _"Let me know if you find anything edible up for grabs, I'm off to admire my hoard."_

Hiccup said nothing. That was technically the royal treasury of Queen Astrid of Naboo, but since Toothless had been the one to carry it all to the ship, he was probably entitled to at least the loan.

* * *

><p>"Damnit, Toothless, we need Anakin with us. Why did you have to do that?"<p>

"_You're just upset you didn't think of it first."_

"You won the Boonta Eve race under your own power, then ate the sponsor!" Hiccup sighed to himself as the shore party pelted for the royal starship. "You're lucky you can catch up to us while we're in the air, because you are going to have to go and grab the parts, as well as both Anakin and Shmi from Watto."

"_And how do I do that?"_ Toothless arrested his loping run, and began to sprint back to Mos Espa.

"Use the force." Hiccup thought a bit, then added over the bond, _"Well, more specifically the state of matter known as plasma."_

* * *

><p>"Senator Palpatine, I'm pleased to-<p>

"_Shiny!" _Toothless broadcast uncharacteristically, and leapt at the Senator for Naboo.

"Only-one, get off the Senator!" Queen Astrid said forcefully to Hiccup as he walked casually over. "Why can't you control your Padawan, Masterâ€| Jedi?"

Toothless happily walked off, lashing his tail and clutching a Lightsaber that was clearly not his in his teeth. Hiccup lazily strolled over to the utterly startled Senator and dumped his backpack â€" a nutrient frame holding a little slug like creature â€" on the floor. "Surprised? Don't beâ€| Darth Sidious. We knew about you from the very beginning, your blood samples on file gave us the midichlorian count we needed. All that was missing was this handy Ysalamari I picked up at a great price on Tatooine, and a chance to ambush you with it."

The senator twitched for his communicator. "Don't bother, my Padawan is already after your apprentice." Blue fire flashed in the sky, and a swoop bike fell in charred fragments. "And there we go."

Mace Windu and Kit Fisto charged onto the platform, stumbling as they entered the Force null field. "Master Jinn! What happened?"

Hiccup pointed to the Senator. "Sith." He gestured at the raining pieces of Swoop bike. "Sith. I would assume that the Senate is going to be a bit less recalcitrant to common sense now, and would recommend that Ysalamari be used to prevent any future manipulation of the chamber. Oh, and this boy here has more Force presence than Yoda. Someone offer to train him or I will."

* * *

><p>"Okay, ready for this? Fastest blockade break on record. So much for that record Solo's so proud of â€" well, when he gets around to it anyway."<p>

"_You bet! Got everything?"_

"Oxygen rebreather, skinsuitâ€| yep, that's everything."

Toothless took to the air in a powerful downbeat of his wings, rising to about ten feet off the ground. _"On threeâ€| twoâ€| oneâ€| go!"_

The two Jedi vanished.

* * *

><p>"We cannot determine what the best course of action is without news from Darth Sidious!" Gunray blustered from his holographic projection at Odi, the blockade control ship commander.<p>

"Be that as it may, Sir, the control ship is ready to destroy the Gungan nation whenever it is ordered. I suggest we do so before they

get organized."

While the two Trade Federation potentates debatedâ€|

* * *

><p>In the access corridor to the Control Computer, a black shape appeared from nowhere.<p>

"_Eat hot plasma!_"_

"_Look, Toothless, you know full well that plasma is almost by definition hot."_

The Control Computer exploded violently, and the pair disappeared again.

* * *

><p>The comm. link flickered and went dead.<p>

"What?" Nute asked blankly.

"I don't know, it must have been some kind of mechanical fault."

All the droids fell over. Nice design for intimidation, but so unstable it literally took a supercomputer to keep them standing.

Just as the Nemoidans were contemplating this, the black form of the huge reptilian Jedi burst into existence in the appropriated throne room.

Hiccup slid off his friend's back. "Now, where were we last time we met? Something about negotiating to defuse hostilities over a trade deal?"

"_I feel like we cheated somehow. This is now basically a holiday Loop."_

"Meh, these things happen. Besides, I seem to recall that Yuuzhan Vong technology is edible."

* * *

><p>Loop 59<p>

* * *

><p>Well, this is a first.

Hiccup blinked, then focused on the interior of the freight lift. "Are we in Anakin's loop again?" It looked like their last, massively disruptive, run through hadn't affected this iteration. Wonderful.

Yep. Second time in a row. And I have a feeling it's not the last.

"Oh, great." Hiccup then grinned. "And you're the same name as last

time?"

Yep. Only-one Toothnobi. Laugh it up, Hiccup Skyfaller.

"Right, point to you. So. Plan?"

The same thing we do with every loop. Try to screw over everyone's minds.

* * *

><p>Senator Astrid twitched in her sleep as the millipede " like insects crawled towards her form.<p>

The malicious beasties scaled the legs of the bed, and began to climb onto her " and she reflexively threw an axe through the window, carrying the two Kouhun on the weapon straight into the hovering droid and smashed it to pieces.

"Zwah? Wh" | "

Toothless loped past her and out the smashed window, heading for Zam Wesell through the air traffic.

Told you she could handle herself.

Hiccup went over to her, helping her to wake up properly. _I didn't expect her to sleep with an axe under her pillow" | in this Loop, anyway. I mean, she's not even Awake this time!_

* * *

><p>Excuse me.

The librarian, Jocasta Nu, turned at the mental voice and pursed her lips. "Oh. _You_ again."

I said I was sorry.

"You knocked over the entire shelves last time!" She threw her arms up. "You're just too big for the library. Big, and rather too clumsy on the ground."

Well" | any idea where this came from?

Toothless brought his tail round. Dangling from the end was a bag containing a small metallic dart.

"Not at all. Hang on, where did you get this?"

Largest bit left of the Bounty Hunter I blew up.

"And I could swear it was your teacher who was heavily into disobedience. Look elsewhere."

* * *

><p>"As you can see, the clones are nearly ready." The Kaminoan prime minister stepped aside, and gestured the visiting Jedi through the opening.<p>

Toothless squeezed through the door into the overlook, and stopped dead.

* * *

><p>THOSE HELBOUND THIRD COUSINS OF ICE TROLLS CLONED ME! UTTER NIMRODS! CHILDREN OF UNHOLY UNIONS BETWEEN BRACHIOPODS AND SHEEP!

Hiccup fell from his chair into the Naboo lakewater.

* * *

><p>Er, Toothless, where are you? The Jedi are taking casualties, we're basically surrounded by far too many droids, and- Hiccup broke off a moment and set another droid regiment on fire "I'm actually starting to get tired._

A grin came over the training bond. Followed by a guitar solo.

"What the hell?" Hiccup muttered as he ducked another wildly enthusiastic axe blow from Astrid. "That sounds like Dragonforce."

Then the sky went black with the flickering appearance of over a hundred thousand teleporting Night Furies.

* * *

><p>Toothless grinned fit to split his face in two. I hereby accept the surrender of the Republic and the Confederacy into the Empire of the Dragon.

Hiccup shook his head ruefully. "You've become a bit megalomaniacal, did you notice?"

I also name my pupil Hiccup as minister for being sensible.

"Well, I could get used to monarchy!"

* * *

><p>Loop 60<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup blinked, and was at the controls of a Jedi starfighter.<p>

Woo. A third Loop in Anakin's world in a row.

Hang on!"

Hiccup looked to the side, and stifled a snort of laughter.

Toothless was awkwardly crammed into the cockpit of his own fighter, leaving barely enough room to reach the control stick with his tail.

Let me guess, you're going to find this funny.

Not at all! Hiccup protested, his case weakened by the sense of hilarity flowing over the link.

Fine then. But this ship is about to just explode from the strain. Where's that hanger we're supposed to land in?

* * *

><p>Hiccup held Count Dooku in a scissor grip, preventing him from moving.<p>

"Well?" Palpatine asked. "What are you hanging around for? Kill him!"

Hiccup blinked. Turned to Dooku. "Any reason you can think of why he'd want you dead?"

Dooku shrugged as much as anyone could with a lightsaber on each side of their neck. "I assume it's related to the supposed kidnapping."

Toothless walked past Palpatine, giving him a ****look****. _Supposed kidnapping?_

"He just turned up on the bridge of the ship as soon as I entered orbit. I certainly never sent any landing craft down. Why would I â€" I was lying in ambush."

Chancellor Palpatine, we will discuss this later. Now, all aboard.

* * *

><p>"So. Why'd you let him off?"<p>

So that the plan I have will be able to come to pass.

"What plan?"

Toothless grinned. _Candid photos!_

* * *

><p>"Chancellor Palpatine, you are under arrest for treason against the Republic."<p>

"Oh? I think you'll have trouble arresting me-"

"Chancellor." Hiccup entered the room. "I just got back from a meeting involving me, a comlink, the security council and three slug-like tree dwellers. Meet the fifty thousand clone troopers who want to enforce Order 65. And their Ysalamari."

The window blew in with a hail of gunfire.

* * *

><p>Loop 61<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup blinked. What the hell?
Suddenly, he was on what his pre-Loop memories recalled to be an oil rig (of all things), with gigantic flying robots fighting all over the place.

>Toothless? You there?

>No response. Wherever his partner was, he wasn't organic.
Soâ€| memories of what had happened thus far.

>As he absently drew a radiotelepathy nanite syringe from his subspace pocket and pricked his skin, he considered. Nothing much, except some strange rumors in the news of robots. Apparently more than just rumors.
â€|iccup? Your favourite dragon here. Good, you got the link up.

>Toothless! What's going on?

>The full mental contact version of a :-(came over the link. I think I'm scripted to be some kind of wannabe leader of the evil faction I'm part of. Meet up later?

>Sure.

"Wowâ€| transforming robots. And I thought the Eva Loop was strangeâ€|"

>"Tell me about it." Toothless grumbled. "Turning into a fighter jet is a little uncomfortable."
The two paused.

>"Soâ€| this whole wannabe leader thing." Hiccup grinned. "Want to make it a reality?"
Toothless gave a metallic smile. "What did you have in mind?"

>"Well, from what I saw, these so-called "Decepticons" are rubbish at actual military combat, and the "Autobots" are no better. They're used to battle being essentially along the lines of single combat or small group engagementsâ€|"
Hiccup reached into his subspace pocket again, and drew out a small transparent cuboid and a pair of electronic instruments that resembled chopsticks. "And we all know who're the best at small unit aerial combat, don't we?"

>Toothless crouched down to see what Hiccup was doing. He recognized the pieces of equipment as the computing kit Hiccup had used back in the Cinnabar Loop when he replaced Adele Mundy, but what he was doing with themâ€|
"Is that a dragon fighter variant?"

>The Viking turned oil rig engineer nodded. "It's fully usable as an additional mode on your changer," he wove his data wands in complex patterns, calling up specifications on hundreds of weapons and ships from dozens of realities. "In addition to that, it's also about five times as combat capable as the Decepticon standard fighter in the air, with the dozens of rapid rate laser launchers replaced by a single mouth mounted 40cm hellbore. Take the Battle Screen and minimissiles into account and it becomes capable of fighting their entire air fleet at once."
"A 40cm Hellbore? What are you planning on us doing, blowing up anyone who disagrees?"

>Hiccup looked confused. "Er, yes. Why, problem?"
"Just checkingâ€|"

"Lord Megatron! Starscream returns from his scouting mission!"

>"I'm surprised." Megatron stood, and began walking to the entrance. "I suppose he's being followed? No other power but self preservation could make him come back on time."
Soundwave interjected. **"Lord Megatron. Fifteen additional radar images of Starscream have appeared, and all have begun extreme manoeuvres".**

>Megatron clapped his face with his hand, producing a loud clang. "Or

he could have decided to overthrow me."
A random Decepticon pointed skywards. "Seekers, to the sky! There is only one of him!"

>Skywarp glanced at Thundercracker. "Seekers?"
"Just go with it."

Sitting in the cockpit on the back of Toothless' new alternate mode, Hiccup's data wands commanded all fifteen decoy missiles, bringing them in as a carefully coordinated weaving pattern intended to make it impossible to tell which was the true transformer without closing to visual range.

>First enemy rising to combat altitude. Wands flashed.

Identified: Sunstorm. Engaging with dogfighting missile salvo. A dozen high speed missiles shimmered off Toothless' wings, reaching out to englobe the Decepticon.

>"Hah!" That fighter called. "You cannot possibly stop me with mere missiles! I am-" One of the Dazzler missiles seeded into the salvo detonated, blinding every frequency with strobing electromagnetic noise. "Gah!" Another dogfighting minimissile shot in at barely subsonic speed, then discarded the manoeuvre sabot and completed its' attack run by engaging a tiny inertialess drive coil.
Hiccup moved on to other targets as the .6 cee missile smashed Sunstorm into a dozen pieces.

>Really, they had little chance. Hiccup was drawing off the advanced technology of about a half dozen different universes, using each to make up for the blind spots in the others.
A _SKOOM _of energy release tore the sky as Toothless used his new Hellbore on Skywarp, catching the tricky teleporter between jumps and smashing his torso.

>Nice shot!

>Thanks. Now, anything you can do about my cycle time? Three seconds is a long time in a fight.

>Hiccup twitched a data wand, and more dogfighting missiles shot off their racks. Tell you what. If you manage to get two more of the Seekers before I flatten them all, you win a pony. Specifically, next time you're organic. As a snack.

>Toothless boosted through the sound barrier. Sounds like a challenge to me!

>Hiccup quickly retasked a missile and simply EMPed one of the Decepticons into the ground. That one was Thundercracker. I think he's a possible lieutenant for you.

Megatron ground his metal teeth as the traitor sharded the entire Decepticon air force. "Fine! I'll take him on myself!"

>"Inadvisable. His main weapon is-"

>"I am the strongest Decepticon, not him! I will win!"
Soundwave paused. **"As you command." **_**Private communication to Starscream: Are you hiring?**_

>Private communication to Soundwave: Run.

>Soundwave dove for cover as a hypervelocity missile salvo destroyed all the defence turrets around the Decepticon base and the hapless Reflectors manning them, then a bolt of fusing plasma blew Megatron's right arm off. Another HVM barrage excised all his remaining weapons, then the usurper flew down to land in front of Megatron.

"Goodbye."
His Hellbore reloaded, Toothless blew Megatron to pieces.

"So you're telling me they actually _pay_ for this?"

>Thundercracker loaded another set of Energon cubes onto the newly rebuilt oil rig, and set them charging.
Hiccup nodded. "Yep, Energon cubes are far more efficient than anything humans have and don't cause any kind of pollution. With the few % we're taking as payment for the service, this'll be more than enough to do the job."

>"Cool. Uh, listen, I got a letter from the UN about "live fire exercises", and I want your advice."
Hiccup scanned the email. "Well, as far as I can see, they want someone to act as a "perfect enemy" in their fighter training exercises, so if you're fine with being shot at by weapons that can't do more than superficial damage, then go ahead."

>"Would I be able to shoot back?"
The human thought. "Probably, if you keep it to weapons that don't badly damage or destroy the aircraft."

>Thundercracker nodded. "Sign me up."<p>

* * *

><p>AN: So there we are. If anyone has other ideas for a world to cross with, let me know.<p>

2. Chapter 2

****Dresden Files****

* * *

><p>Well, there's this. With me around, you have a lot more flair and panache than the normal inhabitant of this loop.

Hiccup Horrendous Haddock, Wizard (he's in the phone book) tried to shut out his familiar. And failed.

Okay, Toothless, look. The whole point of this is that I'm a wizard, in a cultural setting where wizardry is secret. I don't need panache, I need disguise.

Toothless snorted. _You're lucky I agreed to being miniature for the loop._

* * *

><p>"Okay, time to take stock. I'm pretty tired. A horde of Necromancers with incredibly powerful zombies are in the park, preparing to perform the Darkhallow and basically ascend to godhood."<p>

We sound fairly screwed to me.

"Ah, but that is where you're wrong. Because we're Loopers. And if I recall correctly, you've been chafing at the bit to go to full size for the last three years. What's several hundred year old zombies, compared to a fully grown dragon?"

Toothless looked distant for a moment. _Can I be a dragon from _this_ setting?_

"Wait, you can actually DO that here?" The little lizard nodded

smugly. "Now I feel sorry for everyone else ever. Through all of time."

Awwâ€|

"Did I say I was going to stop you? Let's go have fun!"

* * *

><p>"And now, we shall OH F-"<p>

Hiccup nodded to himself as Toothless' first blast of fire went off, like a nuke focused down to a grenade. "Yep. That's some good schadenfreude right there."

Seeing the Big Bads who he'd been running from most of the latest adventure being hit by the kind of wrecking ball violence a dragon could bring to bear in this universe was very, very satisfying. It was also gratifying to know that Toothless probably could have managed to handle them _post_-Darkhallow.

Taking them all out with a reptile the size of a building feels just so right, tooâ€|

* * *

><p>Percy Jackson

* * *

><p>"Welcome to Camp Half-Blood! Now, what kind of powers do you have? It'll help us work out where you're supposed to go."<p>

"Uhâ€|" Hiccup frowned. "I'm quite good at making thingsâ€|"

"Right, right. Hephaestus, possibly."

"But then I'm also good with animals. Well, one animal."

"Ah, could be Artemis. Wait, no, she's the Hunter. Hmmmâ€|"

"And is there such a thing in Greek Mythology as a dragon?"

Chiron paused. "I think there is, but I'll have to check."

* * *

><p>Five minutes later, he was poring over a copy of Jason and the Argonauts and another of _Medea_. "Right. Medea was descended from the Sun God, Helios, and she had a chariot drawn by two dragons that he sent."

The ancient Centaur looked a bit embarrassed. "I don't think we have a Helios building. Might cause some trouble."

Hiccup shrugged. "We'll deal with that if we come to itâ€| I hope. How do I check?"

"The fountain. Over there, where the sign is."

He looked. "That's in Ancient Greek. I can't read it."

"What? That's not right. Half bloods are supposed to be able to read Greek, it's modern English that gives them trouble."

"Can't read that very well either. In fact," he continued as Chiron led him over to the fountain, "I do best with runes."

He took a sip from the fountain, and a symbol appeared above his head.

Chiron evaluated it. "Huh. That's new. Laughing mouth with moustache? And it's in red, too."

"Oh, great. Loki. As if my day wasn't strange enough." Then Hiccup brightened. "Though, if this meansâ€¦" he stretched out an arm, and concentrated. "Framherja!"

A great, golden bow materialized in his grip. With a sure motion, he drew the string back and it formed a crackling lightning bolt. "Ah, it's good to have the old girl back again."

Chiron blinked. "Sorry, what?"

"Turns out that my descent is from a Norse God. This is the daughter of Mjolnir. Hey, Toothless, you want to check yourself?"

The centaur was still trying to absorb that when something bumped into him from behind.

'_scuse me._

Whirling, he saw a twenty foot dragon lumber up to the fountain and take a drink of his own, which produced a red hammer and a similarly coloured face. One side of the face was perfect and unmarred, the other hideous.

Hiccup sniggered. "This means you're the unholy offspring of Thor and Hel themselves, right?"

Just thinking about the first date is giving me a headache.

* * *

><p>Narnia

* * *

><p>"You know what? No."<p>

Aslan looked at Hiccup. "Why not, my son?"

"Okay, first of all, I'm from a completely different cultural tradition so all the religious references are going _way_ over my head. Second, you don't get to claim things like 'I can only be seen if you believe in me'. You. Are. A. God. That's just code for 'I'm screwing with you.' I mean, I've met the invisible pink unicorn. Nice, but a bit annoyed that her invisibility spell won't run down. And third, rightful king is ridiculous. If you're claiming that these

lands are old Narnian instead of belonging to the Telmarines, then it's us lot who have to rule it, and you're not bringing us into that again. On the other hand, if you're saying that the Prince is the rightful ruler then these lands are Telmarine and the Narnians are a displaced conquered people."

He then looked hurt. "I mean, Astrid, Ruff, Tuff and I spent decades negotiating those treaties with Archenland and Calormen. Are they null, then?"

"They have been forgotten. Such do mortal minds behave."

"Right. Again with this. You should really let everyone else know the rules as well."

Hiccup waved an arm in the air, and a circling black dot began to descend followed by two others. "Tell you what. We'll install a republican government instead. I think four dragonriders should be able to make it stick."

* * *

><p>"You are kidding."<p>

"Nope. Caspian won the election."

Hiccup rolled his eyes. "I suspect tampering."

"You're not alone there." Astrid muttered. "I didn't like the way he looked at me, either. And you know how Vikings feel about his type."

"Er, that they're pathetically bad at fighting and only their good sense in hiring us redeems them?"

"That's it."

I have to say I agree. At least terms are limited in this government. Vote Dragon at the next election!

* * *

><p>Game of Thrones

* * *

><p>"Right, that's it. I'm off." Hiccup snapped his fingers, and Toothless materialized next to him. "I'm tired of feudal societies. Sort your own flippin' civil war out, I've got books to read."<p>

The other members of house Frey watched silently as he vanished, then shrugged and turned back to their plans for the Red Wedding.

There were other heirs.

* * *

><p>"What, seriously?" Hiccup asked, shocked.<p>

"Indeed, Sire. There are no other legitimate claimants. Masterful strategy, if I might be so bold."

"All I did was leave and experiment with magic for five years."

The Kingsguard officer shrugged. "Yes. The entire rest of the nobility wiped one another out. You're the sole inheritor of Westeros."

Another dumped a stack of paper on the table. "Here's the inheritances that need signing."

* * *

><p>Lion King

* * *

><p>"Oh, come on." Hiccup muttered to himself. "Lion? Seriously? At least I can still speak reasonably recognizably."<p>

Sniggering came from behind him. He turned, to see three Hyena.

A brief check of his form's pre-Loop memories explained just about everything.

"Okay, shove off, canids. Before I get annoyed."

"You?" Banzai laughed. "Hey, guys! The lion cub's trying to posture just like his dad. But dad's not here to save you this time."

"No, he's not. Which is strange, because you coming here to the Elephant Graveyard is deliberately leaving his protection. Does someone have daddy issues?" Shanzi asked maliciously, directing her two packmates to start surrounding Hiccup.

Ed didn't say anything. Well, apart from laughing.

Stand by ready. Set up.

The three hyenas stopped laughing. Apart from Ed.

"Did you hear that?"

"I heard something."

Hiccup got a canary-eating grin on his face. "Behind you."

Shanzi gestured at Banzai, who looked. "Oh."

Starlight Breaker.

"Don't worry! It's non lethal!" Hiccup called into the crater. "Though you might wish it was. I'll be back later."

* * *

><p>"Hey, Uncle, what does 'violent coup' mean?"<p>

Scar twitched. "Now, why are you asking that, Nephew?"

"Oh, I just heard someone talking about it. I think it was a zebra. Possibly an antelope. But anyway, they were saying they overheard a hyena talking about plans for a violent, ahâ€¦ that was it. Violent, ironic coup. Who do you think they were talking about?"

Scar snarled behind his impassive facade. The boy knew too much. He waited until the cub turned away, and swiped at him.

"But then," the voice came from behind him. His paw throbbed with the impact on the floor of his cave â€" he'd missed. Somehow.

"I think about how the only really ironic thing is how, since we practice salic consanguinity rather than salic primogeniture, you're not the ruler even though dad's younger than you are! Do you think that might be related? I mean, you have a lot of hyena around."

Scar kicked out with his back leg, aiming to slam the boy against the back of the cave. As soon as he'd done so, Hiccup appeared in front of him and leaned casually against one of his front knees, overbalancing him.

As he hit the floor with a _whoof_, Hiccup frowned. "That must have hurt. Anyway, thinking about it I think it must be salic gavelkind. Since grandad's heirs each got some of his land, and all. Possibly it's even semisalic. Do you have any female blood relatives, and did they inherit anything?"

As Scar rolled back to his paws, now openly growling, a bossy voice asking "Where are you?" came from outside the cave, along with the flapping of wings.

Ah, just _brilliant._ Now he had to kill the minder as well, and while he could just about explain away his inconvenient nephew as being a fall, it would be hard to make a story about a bird going over a cliff to its death pass muster.

Then a gigantic black monster came in the door.

"Ah, hello Toothless. Toothless, meet my uncle Scar. He's annoyed about the relative size of his inheritance and wants to mount a violent coup. Do you think you could drop him in the ocean?"

Anything Goes was fun, especially when used on overconfident enemies. That was more or less its' speciality as a martial art. It even worked when the user was quadrupedal, but then Ranma had put a lot of work into it since he had started Looping.

Now, what to do with the rest of the Loopâ€¦ perhaps invent gunpowder again?

* * *

><p>BOLOverse

* * *

><p>The Final War destroyed almost everything. Two interstellar civilizations, the Melconian Empire and the Concordiate of Humanity,

fought each other in a stupid, pointless, self sustaining war until there was nobody left to fight and nothing to fight with. Thousands upon thousands of worlds scorched, dusted, infected, or in some cases killed the old fashioned way. With war machines hundreds of feet long, spitting focused bolts of nuclear fire at other war machines and at infantry and at civilians, even the robotic minds of the super heavy tanks fallen prey to the madness of Ragnarok.<p>

But life is hard to destroy, and while civilization on some planets fell too far for even farming, they never forgot that they had once flown among the stars.

One such world was known to its' inhabitants as Rukbat. There weren't many of them â€" barely three thousand survivors of a planet that had once been home to billions.

They lived on an island in the polar seas. Not by choice, but because the local super heavy tanks had been infected by a virus. They had killed one another, and the last one left believed that everything was the Enemy.

Well, it _had._

* * *

><p>Okay, Toothless, you've got to be out there somewhere. I recognize this universe, only one place has Melconians. At least I'm, well, not one.

After a moment's pause, Hiccup 'heard' a reply. _Oh, brilliant. This virus is in my targeting systems, not anything I can actually mess with. Any ideas?_

You're the Bolo?

Yes. The techno-empathic link sniggered, which felt strange. _Unit XXXIII/D-10125-TLS "Toothless", Mark XXXIII Bolo, at not even my own dubious service. You're going to have to get in range of my audio pickups to actually reset this damn viral overlay. Any ideas?_

Yeah. We've got longboats. I'll just get Ruff, Tuff, Snotlout, Fishlegs and Astrid to help me steal one and come over to the mainland. Can you turn your weapons off somehow?

I'm completely out of expendables, and my reactor ran dry about five years ago. I'll use up all my regular power with flight mode and battle screen, time turning up to about three in the morning.

* * *

><p>"What the hel is that?" Snotlout whispered, looking up at the gigantic, silent war machine in front of them. "It is one of the Ragnarok Trolls?"<p>

"No, idiot." Astrid replied, slapping him on the shoulder. "It's a Bolo, not a Melconian machine. Besides, Trolls were about twenty years out of date by the final stages of Operation Ragnarok."

"How'd you know this was here, Hiccup?" Ruff asked curiously as they

approached.

"I just wanted to see one. Hmm" he walked right up to it.

"Is it safe?" Tuff asked next.

"There's only one working Bolo on the planet." Fishlegs said. "But I think this might be it, because if it's not the working one then how did it get here? And where's the big hole? You have to use a Hellbore to kill a Bolo"

By now Hiccup had started climbing on it. Most of his friends watched in awe as the "runt", who had already done something insanely risky, started just getting ridiculous.

"Hey, there's a running plate up here." He called down softly, brushing away two decades of caked on mud and dust. "Thirty-three-D, one-oh-one-two-five TLS."

There was a clunk, and systems all over the war machine lit up. Most of the teens scrambled for the water in fright.

Hiccup clung on, having guessed something like this would happen.

"Unit One-Zero-One-Two-Five TLS reporting for duty, Commander."

Really, Toothless? Was a Creche-level reset the only option?

You wouldn't be thinking that in such an exasperated tone if you saw the mess my programs are in. I swear that virus actually hijacked the Omega Worm.

Well, it would have to, to get any Bolo to fire on humans.

* * *

><p>Stoic felt the rumbling first. Then the enormous war machine emerged from the spray, suddenly, too suddenly for him to do more than curse his luck - as the colony he had sweated blood to preserve was doomed.<p>

Then a hatch opened in the front and the missing teens staggered out, led by Hiccup wearing some kind of earpiece.

"It followed me home, Dad. Can we keep it?"

* * *

><p>Friendship is Magic

* * *

><p>"You are kidding."<p>

The small green Toothless looked over at his (unusually, four-legged) companion through time and space. "Afraid not. This place is mainly populated by ponies."

As Hiccup â€" well, his memories said he was called Hocus Hiccup, which was even worse than normal â€" contemplated this, a cyanâ€¦ pegasus?... came through the door.

"Hey, Twi, what's the plan for â€" you're not Twilight. Where is she?"

Hiccup rolled his eyes. "Never seen her before. Is she the local Loop anchor? I think I've replaced her."

"Don't know what 'anchor' you're talking about, don't care. Where is she, buster?"

Hiccup and Toothless exchanged glances. "Welcome to your first fused loop, then. Sorry, you're not getting your friend â€" Twilight, right? â€" this loop. I'm taking her place for all intents and purposes."

The cyan pegasus looked suspicious for another second, then closed her eyes and concentrated. Hiccup felt some strange, deep magic pulse for a moment.

"Okay, yeah, she's not anywhere I can feel for some reason. I'll believe youâ€¦ for now. Until AJ can give you a look over, anyway."

"Another looper? Sorry, another time looping person?"

"Yeah, she is. Oh, I'm Rainbow Dash â€" but you can call me awesome."

"Suddenly I'm reminded of Astrid." Hiccup muttered to Toothless, who nodded in return.

* * *

><p>As Nightmare Moon proclaimed her eternal reign, Hiccup looked to the five native Loopers. "This happen every time?"<p>

"Like clockwork." The orange pony â€" AJ â€" said wearily. "Last few times, Twi had us blast her with the elements mid-speech for the hell of it."

"Does it have to be that? Or can she be defeated another way?"

"She can!" The pink pony said. "We usually use Spikezilla every twenty or so loops!"

"Right. Toothless, you're on."

The little dragon nodded, and ran forward. As the girls gasped, he swelled and shifted form into the twenty foot lithe predator from Berk, then took wing.

"Fun fact." Hiccup said, brightly. "Toothless' breed of dragon is called the Night Fury. They're nearly invisible in the dark, and they've evolved as ambush predators against other flying entities at night."

Blue flame shot through the air and erupted on something overhead.

Wing! Two points!

The next shot was green. _Oh, cool. The postal magic can mix in with my fireâ€| hey, Hiccup?_

Yeah?

I just found out how to teleport other objects at range.

Hiccup winced in sympathy for any enemy they would fight in the future. Ever. Except possibly Aizen, who frankly deserved it.

A green fire burned overhead for a moment, and a startled looking Princess Luna slammed into the ground horn first.

Toothless alighted next to her, looking incredibly smug, and shifted back to his loop-native form. "I just teleported her armour right off her. Who's awesome?"

Pinkie raised a hoof. "Ooh, I know this one! It's Dash!"

"You know it!"

Toothless looked slightly deflated. "Whatever. Regardless, Rider, that power is a keeper."

Fluttershy eeped. "Umâ€| did you say, rider? As in, dragon rider?"

"Yeah, I'm normally bipedal. Human, actually, if that means anything toâ€| you?"

All of them were staring at him.

Rarity spoke first. "You mean Lyra was actually _right?_"

With a sigh, Toothless reached into Hiccup's mane, connected to his subspace pocket and pulled out some projection equipment. "We're going to have to give them the 'welcome to the multiverse' talk. Why is it always us?"

"Ranma's having a year off?" Hiccup suggested, then sniggered at the thought of how _he'd_ take this universe. Wild horse indeedâ€| especially since the gender ratio seemed about five to one in favour of female, here.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile, in an entirely different universe, Harry Potter watched with interest as Quirrelmort was used as a ping-pong ball by the unicorn he'd tried to kill.<p>

"And _this_ is for basing your strategy on inadequate research!"

Note to self, make sure this unicorn never meets Hermionie.

A phoenix flamed in for a moment, then vanished towards Hagrid's hut and the young dragon within.

Huh. I thought he didn't feel like Fawkes. And Norbert wasn't femaleâ€| wonder if that's linked somehow.

* * *

><p>"So, how do we beat Discord this time?" Dash asked. "New guy, you got any ideas?"<p>

Hiccup mulled over everything he'd been told about the chaos entity. "Okay, I know. I'll Befriend him."

"We tried that. Pinkie's the only one who can do it reliably."

"You're not familiar with Nanoha's world. The word has a different meaning there. Toothless?"

The rest of them looked over to the black dragon â€" and didn't find him. Instead there was a small black octahedron.

Stand by. Ready.

Hiccup picked Toothless' Device form up in a hoof. "Right, let's go."

* * *

><p>"Ah, hello." Discord said, emerging from the stained glass window.<p>

Hiccup tilted his head, examining the magic. "Okay, this'll work." With a thought, he transferred Raising Dragon to his back, where it transformed into a kind of harness with a pair of gigantic cannons.

_Set up. _Blaster-three._

With a grin, Hiccup planted his hoof. The floor cracked, and strings music came from nowhere. "I always wanted to do this."

Firing Lock is cancelled.

"Oh, I saw thisâ€|" Discord said, sounding nervous. "Can't remember how it ended, though."

Cartridge load. Divine Buster.

"Right, right, that was it." The draconequus fled the palace through the window.

Pinkie grinned. "I remember this video too!" Her voice changed slightly. "He's going to blast right through the walls? Oh dear sweet mother of Celestia!"

Said deity's eyes widened, just before the gigantic eruption of magic demolished one of the load-bearing walls of her palace.

* * *

><p>"Owie." Discord said, coughing out smoke.<p>

There didn't seem to be much else to say.

* * *

><p>Halo

* * *

><p>"Ah, I see. Unlike my teleports, the coordinates have to be-"<p>

MCPO H-117 slapped his helmet. "You did that on purpose."

"Fine." Toothless, Smart AI, said with a huff. "You try saving the captain without my help, then."

Hiccup glanced over at the wall separating them from the control room of the Truth and Reconciliation. "That grille. It's made out of five centimetre thick exotic armour."

"So tell me something we don't know."

"Wraith armour is thicker than that, and all it takes to get through that is a couple of rockets." The Master Chief slung his rocket launcher off his back, and extracted six rockets from their disposable tubes. Cramming half his stock of grenades into the pile, he moved to a nearby corner, tossed a Plasma grenade and dove out of line of sight.

A colossal explosion blew down the thin wall, and Hiccup rushed in with his shotgun at the ready.

"Huh." Toothless commented, looking at the smashed Flood. "They were standing far too close."

"Happens." Hiccup let the armour's strength enhancers do most of the work as he extracted Captain Keyes from the forming proto-gravemind. "Is he going to be okay?"

"Scanningâ€¦ probably not. Not with the technology this world has, anyway."

Hiccup reached into nothingness, and pulled out a simple Japanese sword. "Then we cheat."

The Zanpakuto Hisagomaru had as its property that it could absorb wounds, using them to charge it. There didn't seem to be any practical limit.

Hiccup shrugged, plunged the 'weapon' into the Captain's leg, and watched with some satisfaction as it stripped the Flood infection from him entirely.

Absently putting Jacob Keyes into his subspace pocket, he examined the Zanpakuto, which was covered in eerie violet light.

"I didn't know this thing could overcharge."

"Neither did Hanataro. Try using it."

* * *

><p>A glowing arc of energy sliced Halo in half.<p>

* * *

><p>"Wow."<p>

"Agreed." Toothless muttered, as _Truth and Reconciliation_ began to fall apart around them. "Hey, there's a Phantom three decks down. Those have slipspace drives."

"On it."

* * *

><p>The Gravemind hissed, and brought its' final catch into the view of the other.<p>

Hiccup stared at the unusually short Elite, clad in the ornate armour of the Arbiter. "Hang on, is thatâ€|"

"Finally." Astrid muttered. "You have any idea how annoying it is to be a female Fleetmaster, even before you blew up most of my fleet back on Halo?"

"Er, sorry?"

"_It seems your fates were once entwined, as now they are again._

Take you that fire and fury hence, and-."

The Gravemind exploded in a torrent of ionized particles.

"Hey, I just found the remote operation mode for a Covenant battlecruiser." Toothless said. "Feels like old times. You know, invisible death from above, that kind of thing."

Chief and Arbiter landed heavily, and backed against one another. Astrid threw Hiccup a spare energy sword.

"Oh, great. Time to be a Viking again." Hiccup said with a sigh. "Strand yourself in Hel, then fight a way out. I preferred it when we had vehicles."

"That's Looping for you." Astrid shrugged. "Hey, at least the Covenant is falling apart. Should be fun."

"Your idea of fun scares me." Hiccup moaned.

* * *

><p>PokÃ©mon

* * *

><p>Lugia erupted from the sea, ready to defend his chosen one from the three rioting legendaries, only to findâ€|<p>

A smug looking shiny charizard and three beaten-up birds lying around.

Hiccup finished looking through his pack and tossed Pok   balls at all three, capturing them. "Well, this'll make the League easy."

"Char." Toothless agreed, before looking annoyed. He'd been trying to work out how to speak in this universe ever since meeting the bizarre Meowth.

"_That's not really what you're supposed to do." _Lugia admonished. _"I know they cause trouble, but capturing them usually wrecks the climate."_

"I got all three at once, so maybe it won't be such a problem." Hiccup asked. "That said, we do need to reset the weather. Someone could get a Castform over here, perhaps?"

* * *

><p>Fate

* * *

><p>Runes flared, and light blossomed in front of Sakura Matou as her summoning circle triggered.<p>

A young man in leather armour appeared with a _bang_, and the elder Matou watching her from the corner raised an eyebrow.

It appeared she had been successful. _For once_, he thought.

"Uh, hang on, never done _this _before." The presumed Heroic Spirit said, steadying himself. "Er  | servant Rider. Upon your summoning I have come forth. I ask of you, are you my master?"

Rider. Not too poor a Servant, though that depended of course on his abilities. Hopefully he would be able to help Shinji win the Grail War, or kill someone else at least   " there were backups in place for any situation.

* * *

><p>"So, what use are you?" Shinji asked, rudely.<p>

"Hey, where'd the one who summoned me go?" Hiccup stretched, feeling the lightness that came with being a Heroic Spirit. It wasn't bad, having a mana bond.

"You don't need to concern yourself with the useless bitch. I'm your Master now." He held up the command seals on his arm. "What are your abilities as a Servant, anyway?"

Hiccup shrugged. "Good at riding, I have a supernatural mount, I've got a bow, and you're an idiot if you want me to show them off in the middle of a crowded area just as the Grail War starts."

"About that. You'll have to drain civilians for power, I don't have

enough to-

Hiccup formed Framherja in a tenth of a second. His arrow went into Shinji's elbow on the arm with the command seals and blasted it off. "See, this is why I wanted to go with the girl. She seemed nice."

Shinji started swearing at Hiccup, at his sister " adopted, apparently " at his grandfather, at everything.

Hiccup ignored him, turning to an open space. "So much for a low profile. Kindness of Youth."

The familiar tail-piece materialized, then Toothless. _Wow, you didn't last long with him this time._

"I hate this universe. It's too full of intrigue for my taste. What do you say we go mess with Shirou for a bit?"

I'm up for it.

* * *

><p>Shirou twitched. He could have sworn there was something watching him, but every time he looked around there was nobody there, and nobody else had said anything.<p>

A rush of wind buffeted him, and he looked around for the source. Nothing.

Then he turned back to the road, and saw some kind of dragon-thing hiding in an empty skip, with a small leafy branch in front of its' face.

"What the-

I'm spotted! boomed out over the area, though apparently only he heard it. _Cheese it!_

The creature vanished with a crack of thunder.

* * *

><p>Well? Hiccup asked.

He's seen me twice now, I give it three more goes before he starts questioning his sanity. What then?

Then, we knock him out with a two-by-four, leave him on his front porch with a half-empty bottle of scotch, and never come back here this Loop.

Toothless purred, a deep rumbling sound._ I like your style._

* * *

><p>Home

* * *

><p>Right, it's done, Toothless sent. _Every dragon within flight range of Berk is on holiday in the Caribbean._

Hiccup nodded to himself. _Thanks. I fancied a quiet Loop._

* * *

><p>"I'm telling you, Gobber, it's a disaster!" Stoic said, shaking his head. "Three days without any attacks and we're all going stir crazy!"<p>

Gobber absently punched a Viking in the face as the latter tried to attack him. "I see what you mean. We're a little used to letting off steam every now and again."

"You have to let us use the ones in the training arena!"

"Can't do that, Stoic." Gobber shrugged. "They're gone as well. Don't know how it happened."

The big Vikings sighed. What was a Viking to do without dragons around?

* * *

><p>"Er, Hiccup."<p>

"Oh, hey dad." Hiccup stood up from his desk. "Sorry I haven't been doing very well at training, but, then, there's only so much you can do with a wooden cutout, hehâ€|"

"Yes, about that." Stoic sat down. "Now, I know you'reâ€| different, compared to the rest of us. Smarter, in other words. And, well, we need help."

"What's the problem?"

Stortlout crashed through the wall, picked himself up, and charged back towards the thrower.

"Well, more or less that." The big Viking sighed. "It's two weeks since the last time anyone saw a dragon. And we're all going completely mad. There's no way to work out frustrations!"

"Soâ€|" Hiccup said, curious.

"So, I need you to find out what made the dragons go away. We need them back!"

The boy blinked. "Sure, fine. I'll see what I can do."

* * *

><p>What, already?

Yes, Toothless. Fifteen days and they want them back. Yes, you won the bet.

* * *

><p>Two days after that, a black dragon with a human on top led several hundred dragons to land on the edges of Berk's field.<p>

"Alright!" Hiccup shouted. "The team who get the oval ball-" he threw it into the centre, "-into the posts the most times by sundown is the winner!"

"What are the rules?" Fishlegs shouted back, being one of the only people actually able to react with something that wasn't shock.

"No lethal weaponry. If it's not lethal, it's fine."

There was a pause.

"Wait, that's_ it_?" Snotlout called next. "I like this game! Come on, everyone!"

Hiccup and Toothless, both wearing large striped black-and-white shirts (Toothless' one fitted surprisingly well), dove to opposite sides as the colossal scrimmage began.

Nothing like a good game of rugby.

* * *

><p>AN: Well, I came back to this.

Framherja is a bow from the very good fic Hitchups. I thought it would make sense as Hiccup's "legendary weapon" for things like the Fate universe.

3. Chapter 3

****Warhammer 40K****

* * *

><p>The In Nomine Solus accelerated out of orbit, a small ship with a heavy weight aboard " for it was the private vessel of an Imperial Inquisitor.

Hiccup, Ordo Malleus, turned from his contemplation of the surface of Europa. "Any luck, Fishlegs?"

"Indeed." Fishlegs replied. The burly Viking was a tech-priest in this particular reality, though not particularly augmented yet. "Almost all records on the incident were eliminated " but I found a clean copy, in Titan archives themselves."

"Did they detect you?"

"Nope!" Fishlegs grinned. "Our dragons being proper AIs here made it easy for me to sneak in. And there's the proof."

"Actually, isn't that heresy?" Astrid asked. "Not that I care, but aren't AIs anathema to this place?"

"If anyone asks, she's a really vivacious Machine Spirit." Fishlegs

said. "The kind that smites the foes of the Imperium with insulting comments as well as the blessed weapons of her carriage. Anyway, that record?"

"Forward it to the High Lords under my seal. Toothless and I have business."

Finally.

* * *

><p>Hiccup, encased in Artificer power armour, floated in space a-dragonback. Toothless' time on Pern had given him the capacity to survive for about twenty minutes in space without air supply, but Hiccup was somewhat more fragile.<p>

Once more, he scrutinized the printout before him. It was a mere fragment, a pict-capture from over fifteen millennia ago. From the Dark Age of Technology. It had taken Fishlegs and his dragon/AI a month to dig it out of the archives of Mars.

But it was a time-stamped real image of a spacecraft lifting off. It was a suitable jump coordinate.

Well, time to go.

Man and dragon vanished.

* * *

><p>Hiccup's warband â€" composed entirely of reality-displaced Vikings â€" watched silently as the Exorcist strike cruiser Absolution bombarded Titan.

"That's going to change things." Astrid said finally, as the cyclone torpedo took flight.

"It's not the only thing." Fishlegs muttered. "When _are_ they getting back?"

"Five minutes ago."

They whirled from the viewscreen, which meant that the vast detonation that scoured the surface of all life went unseen.

Hiccup carefully lifted down a large metal crate from Toothless' saddle. "Here it is. One complete Standard Template Construct, from the third wave diaspora. Uncorrupted."

Fishlegs practically pounced. "At last! Now we see what the Baneblade was built as an escort tank for!"

* * *

><p>Fairy Tail

* * *

><p>Hiccup scratched his head. "What element are you, actually?"

Fire?

"Fire's taken. Natsu and Dragoneel."

What about Lightning?

"Not sure. Is Lightning taken?"

"Yeah, Laxus is the Lightning dragonslayer." Natsu said, shrugging.
"Sorry."

Hm. Dragonslayers are based off what you eat, right?

"I think they are."

Does that make me the Herring dragon?

"How would that even work?" Hiccup asked, before Happy overrode him.

"Wow! So I'm the Herring dragonslayer! I never knew we were so connected, mister Toothless!"

* * *

><p>War Gods

* * *

><p>Bazhell heard the hoofbeats before he saw the other rider. He and Walsharno rode with the flowing speed of a Wind Rider and his courser, and nothing else on the face of the earth could catch them.<p>

But the hoofbeats he heard were indeed closing in. So, as the two champions reached a rise, they halted to gaze back along their trail.

That's the shortest Wind Rider I've ever seen. Walsharno said suddenly.

Bazhell grimaced. "Ah, saw him first, did you? Well, I'm after thinking that we've no grounds to comment on another's height â€" what with me being the _tallest_ Wind Rider there's ever been, and all."

You _might not. _I_ feel entirely justified._ The Courser shook himself. _His mount makes up for it, though._

"Aye." The Hradani said. "Great black brute, by the looks of him."

* * *

><p>"This is very discomfoting." Hiccup muttered, steadying himself.
"You feel a lot different like this."<p>

I can hardly help it, Hiccup. Toothless replied, climbing the hill in a great flowing surge of strength. _I miss my tail, though._

"Ah, well." Hiccup checked his bow and sword, and made doubly certain that his new rank-mark was displayed across his breast. "There they are. I doubt there's another Hradani Wind Rider."

Hail, Walsharno. Toothless projected out, strangely formal.

"Hail, Bazhell Banahkson." Hiccup echoed, raising a hand in greeting as Toothless slowed. "Nice day for it."

Bazhell sniggered, then looked slightly embarrassed. "Aye, it seems the Wind plain has blessed us for now."

"Shall we keep going, Wind Brother?" Hiccup said, wobbling slightly. "It's a goodly way to the capital â€" and I'm bound there, same as you."

"Oh?" Bazhell said, ears twitching. "What kind of business might you have in Sothofalas?" Both coursers accelerated smoothly back up to their ground-eating canter as he spoke.

"My master, Wencit, sent me there in case I might be of assistance â€" to yourself, in fact. He sends his regards, and I have letters from such as he and Zarantha, your kinswoman."

"By adoption, of course." Bazhell reminded. "Alright, I'll look over them when we next stop. But if my ears don't deceive me-

"And they certainly seem large enough not to." Hiccup said quickly.

The Hradani rolled his eyes. "Tomanak preserve me, you sound as bad as Brandark."

"I can't play the Balalaika, so you're safe from the Lay of Bazhell Bloody-Hand." Hiccup laughed.

"Thank the gods for small mercies. Now, as I was saying before you so cunningly diverted me, I seem to recall hearing you refer to Wencit as your _master._ Am I aright with that?"

"Yes." Hiccup looked nervous, and Toothless edged a little away from his fellow courser. "He took me on as an apprentice. I'm in training as a white wizard â€" he seems to think that my bond with Toothless will allow me to draw power without the decades of building finesse."

Walsharno laughed, keeping step throughout. _Did you just call your companion "Toothless"?_

"Yeah, blame me." Hiccup said, deadpan. "It's the translation of his name, and he prefers it â€" gods help me."

"Why's he even after being called Toothless in the first place?" Bazhell asked. "It's hardly in line with normal courser names, at all, at all."

The young Wind Rider shrugged helplessly. "Maybe his sire and dam were playing an elaborate joke? _He_ certainly has a good sense of humour."

* * *

><p>"Something's not right." Bazhell mused, as they set up camp for the night. Both coursers and the Hradani could likely have made it clear to Sothofalas before needing a rest â€" but Hiccup, being merely human, could not. Since things were hardly urgent, they had decided on twelve hours of riding a day.<p>

"What?"

"I don't know. It reminds me ofâ€| ah, something."

A twig cracked, and then armed men seemed to spring from the very ground. Bazhell instantly summoned the Rage, his enormous sword singing through the air as he attacked into the teeth of the ambush. Walsharno was at his side within a second, and he swung himself astride between one stroke and the next.

Hiccup too had taken to his mount, but broke for distance rather than close in for hand to hand. Bazhell heard the receding hoofbeats and quashed any suspicion. Hiccup was a Wind Brother, and wouldn't abandon another courser â€" no matter if he was prejudiced against Hradani.

Then, a sizzling bolt of fire split the night and erupted on one of the attackers, blowing them apart.

Bazhell grinned savagely, and pressed forward into the suddenly much less confident bandits.

* * *

><p>"What was that after being?" he asked a few minutes later.<p>

"Oh, the bowfire. Well," Hiccup lifted his horsebow from the sheath. "It's one of the strictures that wizardry is only to be used against other wizards. This is sort of a loophole. Framherja here has enchantments that make her shots bolts of lightning. When I fuel her, I'm only using my own energy and that of Toothless â€" and all I'm doing is fuelling her. She creates the actual lightning."

"It sounds to me like quite a fine line."

"It is, actually." Hiccup rubbed the back of his head. "But the deciding factor, really, is that she's still a bow. If I hit someone with her they're likely to be out of the fight one way or another. And I have to nock, draw, aim and loose just as a normal bow â€" all the bow does is, well, remove the need for a quiver."

"Forgive me for still being a mite suspicious." Bazhell said, examining Frahmerja.

"I'm not surprised you are. But Wencit tells me that she was originally created by Sorbus for Khalifrio, soâ€|"

"Aye, the ways of the Gods are confusing. Tomanak knows Himself's been like that a time or two."

* * *

><p>Kingdom Hearts

* * *

><p>"What can we do?" Goofy asked. "They've got thirteen Darknenses, and they're all the same kinda person!"<p>

Hiccup grinned. "I have a plan." He cleared his throat. "I hereby surrender my position as one of the Seven Lights, in favour of Toothless."

"Why'd you do that?" Riku asked.

"Wellâ€|" twenty black dragons materialized overhead. "All of those are Toothless."

"That's got to be cheating."

"Not my problem, our enemies are using time travel." Hiccup withdrew a book. "Call me when this is over."

* * *

><p>Sonic colours

* * *

><p>"Come on, Toothlessâ€|" enough is enough."<p>

This is a self repairing cake! Toothless replied, still munching. _I'll join you once I've caused enough financial damage to Eggman's organization that he goes bankrupt._

"You knowâ€|" Hiccup said, speculatively. "I hear that the last form of Wisp is one that focuses on eating."

Then what are we waiting for? The black dragon erupted from the ground, crouched, and shot off at about mach 0.9.

"I still don't know how he does thatâ€|" Hiccup muttered. "Oh, right, I'm supposed to be hacking computers or making a translator or something."

* * *

><p>Taltos

* * *

><p>When are you going to actually start doing things, boss?

Shut up, Toothless. Hiccup finished disarming the Dzurlord he was fighting. "There. That's the flaw in your style â€" you're much too big a target."

The Dzur tensed, but then slumped. "As you say. I can't believe a _Jhereg_ beat me, let alone an Easternerâ€|"

Hiccup's familiar chose that moment to land on his shoulder.

With a crash, the Jhereg minor noble collapsed to the floor. "Get off!"

"What, I too much for you?"

"You wouldn't be if you stayed in the form you Awoke in this loop, now get off me!"

* * *

><p>NO, Toothless.

"What?" Toothless whined. "I want to transform and eat the Jenoine."

"I said no, and I mean no." Hiccup took the Morganti dagger from the Jenoine, while still carrying on the conversation with his familiar. "You heard Vlad when he turned up on Berk, the last Dragon Rumble loop. If I follow the original loop to the letter, I get a godslaying weapon."

Toothless projected an image of a begging dragon. "And then?"

"Yes, then you get to eat the Jenoine."

* * *

><p>Home

* * *

><p>Stoic the Vast rushed over to his wounded son, as the debris from his last invention settled " and stopped, taken aback.<p>

Through a tear in Hiccup's tunic, he could see scales.

The boy saw where he was looking, and flinched " and the scales melded back into skin once more. But Stoic knew what he'd seen.

"What are you?"

"Hey, come on, dad, no need for-" Hiccup waved his hands frantically, walking away from Stoic.

"What. Are. You. You're not my son."

Hiccup laughed, a hissing thing, as he backed away, and the voice that spoke next was not his own. "Finally figured it out?" The tunic, then the rest of Hiccup's clothes, tore as his body slowly transformed. Bones creaked, wings erupted from his back, and within a minute what stood there was a Changewing.

"The boy left years ago, Stoic! He was never suited for your tribe."

"Monster." Stoic raised his hammer, and the Changewing took off to hover above the village.

"You'll never find the rest of us!" The dragon said as a parting shot, and flew off.

* * *

><p>Did it work?

Hiccup focused as he landed, and demorphed. Wings disappeared, bones and muscles shrank, and shortly he was human again. "I think so. Remind me to thank Tobias for letting me take one iteration of the Morphing Cube."

Will do. Right, get that scrying pool set up, I want to see what's going on.

* * *

><p>"You heard what the dragon said, Gobber. There's more than one of them!"<p>

"Aye, aye. It's something we'll have to handle before you set off on that raid you're planning." Gobber's face then became speculative. "Though, come to think of it, setting off on a raid would be a good way for a Changewing infiltrator to lead us all into danger."

Several Vikings exchanged suspicious looks.

"For that matterâ€¦" Gobber continued musing, oblivious to the effect of his words. "I don't know whether saying an investigation would be a waste of time might not be what a Changewing would doâ€¦ or if insisting on an investigation would be a better cover, because nobody would believe the one who was saying that was an-

Someone punched him in the face. "Begone, Changewing!"

The brawl spread within seconds.

* * *

><p>Wow.

"Yeah, it is happening pretty quick." Hiccup said, chuckling. "Now, Astrid said she'dâ€¦"

* * *

><p>"Fools!" Astrid Hofferson shouted, loud enough to be heard over the crowd. "I have you all tricked, for I am secretly a double infiltrator!"<p>

Snotlout shoved her. "Shows what you know. I'm a triple infiltrator. I infiltrated my own spy ring."

"I infiltrated the pantry last month." Fishlegs murmured, looking downcast.

Everyone looked at the twins. Ruff rolled her eyes. "We are not saying we infiltrate each other, that's just disturbing."

* * *

><p>The Legend of Spyro

* * *

><p>"This makes me feel frankly useless." Hiccup muttered, floating through the air on buzzing insectile wings. "I mean, what did Sparx even do in this world normally?"

"I understand he made sarcastic comments and pointed out which way to go." Toothless replied, as the young black dragon hopped from log to log. "In other words, you should feel right at home."

"Yeah, thanks." Hiccup the Dragonfly facepalmed. "That is really not helping."

"You could try learning protective magic." Toothless pointed out. "I mean, that's what the other Sparx does."

"Trueâ€|" Hiccup lay back in mid-air. "But that sounds like too much effort. I think I'll just try introducing high technology and see if that helps."

* * *

><p>"Legends tell of a purple dragon, who will change the world."<p>

Toothless looked up at the great red Elder, Ignitus, with dull eyes. Hiccup said what both of them were thinking.

"Uhâ€|" this guy is black? Don't know how your colour vision is, old man, but last I checked, purple was made up of blue and red, not no light and less light."

"You're slightly purple." Ignitus said, after looking Toothless over carefully. "In the right light."

"Yeah, that's called reflection?" Hiccup said. "You're red, the sky is blueâ€|" hey, watch this! I can make 'im a gold dragon."

"Look." Ignitus said, shaking his head. "Your egg was purple, you're the only other dragon left on the planet who isn't evil or captured, and I have arthritis."

"Dragons don't get arthritis." Hiccup said flatly.

"And how would you know?"

"You're flying creatures, which means that your bones are honeycomb and low density. Hence, the pads that when worn away cause arthritis through their lack are in fact not present at all, since instead the joints are directly associated with a smooth interface surface and grow throughout your lives, outstripping the erosion of the smooth surface."

Ignitus blinked.

"What?" Hiccup asked. "I watch House."

"You don't, Hiccup." Toothless said. "That was another one of your crazy schemes."

"Aw, come on!" Hiccup said. "We need to create actual good TV next time we're in a nuclear tech level world, and it's either a modified form of House using Mayuri Kurotsuchi or you and I solve crimes by time travel."

"â€|I have to admit, I'd watch that first one." Toothless said, nodding.

Ignitus winced. Apparently the legendary purple-if-you-squint-in-the-right-light dragon was just a little off his rocker.

"Right, let's go." Toothless said, flaring his wings. "Hiccup, time me please."

"On it." Hiccup started a miniature stopwatch.

Toothless took off to about an inch clearance from the ground, and vanished.

"What just happened?" Ignitus asked, shocked.

"Well, Toothless is a master of four elements. Fire, More Fire, Void and Apathy." Hiccup said earnestly. "The Void element lets him teleport, and the Apathy element means he doesn't much care for an epic quest when something much more prosaic will do the job."

Toothless rematerialized. "Time?"

"Twenty-eight seconds." Hiccup announced, over the thuds of Volteer, Cyril, Terrador and a rather bruised Cynder hitting the floor outside.

"Better than last time."

Hiccup nodded. "What did you do this time?"

"Conservation of angular momentum." Toothless belied his name and grinned, as a portal into Convexity yawned in the distance behind him â€" and a comet four hundred metres across screamed into it and vanished.

He snapped his tail absently, and only the first wisps of the colossal explosion made it through before the portal shut with a _crack_.

"Right." Hiccup said, ignoring the dumbfounded Ignitus. "Where did I put those cultural uplift filesâ€| I'll have tanks before the end of the Loop if I have anything to say about itâ€|"

"You do that." Toothless said. "Meanwhile, I'm going to go ask Cynder if she fell out of heaven. She's clearly an angel."

"Despite the black leathery wings."

"Pretty familiar to me."

"The terrible size disparity."

"I like the larger ladies."

"And how you beat her up nine ways in as many seconds."

"Girls respect strength. It said so in that magazine I picked up."

* * *

><p>"For goodness' sake, leave me alone!" Cynder said, shaking her head at Toothless.<p>

"Why?" Toothless asked. "You're the same size as me and I'm the only male dragon for whom that's remotely true in a hundred miles."

"That's not the point!" Cynder sighed. "Besides, you're stalking me. It's creepy."

"I don't think it can really be counted as stalking." Hiccup commented from overhead. "On account of how he's really not even bothering to try to hide. At this point it's just generically pathetic."

"Quiet you." Toothless said. "And please, my angel of pulchritude, wilt thou not consider mine requestâ€ she's gone. Hiccup, you distracted me."

"When you come to your senses, you'll thank me." Hiccup shrugged.

* * *

><p>Exalted

* * *

><p>Hiccup Awoke in the loop, and ducked immediately as a punch from some kind of goblin nearly took his head off.<p>

Calculating in his head, he judged the exact point to attack, and punched back-

And the goblin went flying into the distance at close to the speed of sound.

This world is broken. Fix it.

Hiccup blinked, as a second set of memories flooded into him.

The first age. The Unconquered Sun. Primordials. Giant robots made of magic. Awesomeness.

The great curse. The dragon-blooded rebellion. Death.

Release. Rebirth.

Exaltation.

Hmmm. Came the voice of what Hiccup, Twilight caste Solar Exalt, now knew to be the Unconquered Sun. This is new. You're not native to Creation, are you?

"Nope." Hiccup answered, as he fought off the rest of the band of attackers with ridiculously over the top martial arts. "Time Looper, this is my first time here."

Well, you're very bright. That's why you got a Twilight caste Exaltation. And I suspect that the multiple other Exaltations that just took place are yourâ€¦ does 'retinue' work?

"Yeah, it'll do." Hiccup finished the last goblin off by punching it through a mountain. "I could get to like this place."

Wait till you see the enemy.

Hey, Hiccup! A more familiar voice spoke in his mind. _Toothless in da Reality._

Hiccup sighed. _Never say that again._

Sorry. Toothless sent a sense of abashment. _I just cut a castle in half with my wing, I'm feeling kind of keyed up at this point. Look, send me coordinates and I'll join you._

Will do.

Who was that? the Unconquered Sun asked. I don't usually hang around this long, but you're _really_ interesting.

"That was Toothless. He's my partner in our base world. Basically, I shot him down, he nearly killed me, we were friends ever since." Hiccup rattled off.

Right. Okay, here's the basic Guide to Creation as it currently stands.

Hiccup listened, waving as a thirty foot long black dragon with a Dawn caste mark flashed into existence overhead.

By the time Toothless landed, the Sun had finished.

Hiccup was quiet for a moment.

"Right, I think I have my agenda. Step one, beat up the Deathlords. Step two, reverse the great curse. Step three, pull the plugs on those damn Games of Divinity!"

Aww. But I like the Games of Divinity.

"I could understand escapism if the world were boring or mundane, but seriously!" Hiccup said. A flash of light caught his eye, as a rather familiar looking Full Moon caste exalt arrived on the back of a Changing Moon caste Nadder. "Oh, and that reminds me. Also turn the Solar controls over Lunars _off_, that's just wrong."

_You just don't want Astrid to be angry at you when we Loop out of

this reality again._

"Can you blame me?"

Nope. Stormfly's quills sting.

"Huh." Hiccup said, frowning. "She went back to that name?"

Yeah. Said 'Bluebell' was a phase. I think the others gave up their silly names too.

"Anyway." Hiccup thought. "We've got basically three options for this. Option one is that we just use our Looping experience and powers to hit Essence 10 straight off and punch problems until they no longer exist, and option two is basically that I get building giant robots and never stop."

"Hey, guys!" Fishlegs shouted from overhead. "Took me a while to find you."

"Hey, Fish â€" wait, is that caste mark what I think it is?" Hiccup shouted back.

"If you think it's Chosen of Battles, you're right!" Meatlug landed and Fishlegs slid off her back. "Good thing Meat here was Chosen of Journeys, or it could have taken forever to get here. Hey, where are Snotlout and the twins?"

"Not sure." Hiccup shrugged. "I suspect the twins were Terrestrially exalted and that Snotlout is causing havoc in the underworld. But more importantly, do you know Grandmother Spider Mastery?"

"Yeah." Fishlegs said.

"Good. Now, let's seeâ€"|" Hiccup's hands flew between his subspace pocket and the air in front of him, shaping an orb out of nothingness in moments. "Here we go. This is an omniscifier."

"What does it do?"

"It shows all of Creation, above and below ground, and the whole underworld â€" as well as every manse interior and so on. Basically, everything that exists."

"Cool. But whyâ€"|" oh. I like how you think, Hiccup!" Fishlegs said, making the connection. Taking a stance, he exhaled sharply. "Form of the Charcoal march of spiders. Grandmother spider mastery. Pattern spider touch!"

He struck at thin air, which rippled. The world seemed to shake slightly.

"So, what did you do?" Astrid asked.

Fishlegs shrugged. "I punched everything in the universe that wasn't benevolent, and turned it into a duck."

I like this reality! Stormfly said. _Let's not leave till we learn how to do more of this stuff._

* * *

><p>Undisclosed.

* * *

><p>What are you doing?

"Hacking stuff." Hiccup replied, steadying the laptop. "You're going to love this."

Oh?

"I finally found out where we are."

This better be good. Toothless muttered, though his irritation clearly wasn't full-bodied. He was stretched out on the top of their small plateau in Arizona, soaking up the heat of the sun.

"Well, the key is actually how close to Phoenix we appeared this Loop. Turns out, that's a place mentioned a lot in the fictional version of this Loop â€" you know, from that stash we picked up in the Trek Loop."

Go on.

"Look." Hiccup turned the screen so his friend could see.

â€|that is the cover of a Twilight book.

"Yes. Yes, it is." Hiccup said flatly. "Want to see which traditional vampire hunting techniques work on them?"

I rather thought the point was that they were immune to most vampire hunting techniques.

"Well, most vampire hunting techniques aren't developed by Hellsing." Hiccup reached into his subspace pocket, and pulled out an anti-materiel rifle. "Two shots of this, and then we move up to the Hammerhead Gunship."

Toothless rolled upright. _I call airstrike._

"Actually, we have government backing on this one. You would not _believe_ how many laws even those 'good' vampires break on a yearly basis. Forget you doing airstrikes, we're going to have Warthog top cover."

I'm hurt. Really hurt.

"Well, your attacks are too precise. We need to hose the entire site down with Avenger autocannon fire. It's the only way to be sure."

* * *

><p>AN:</p>

There's been a little confusion about what I meant in that last Loop. To clarify, when I mention a Warthog in there, it's not the Haloverse one. Haloverse Warthogs, being four-wheeled ground vehicles, cannot

provide top cover (a term meaning orbiting aircraft ready to give support).

No, the Warthog that Hiccup is talking about is a real world one. The Fairchild-Republic A-10 Thunderbolt II, for which "Warthog" is the colloquialism. It's a ridiculously rugged ground attack aircraft whose main gun (a GAU-8/A Avenger autocannon) is just crazy. It fires 30x173 mm rounds with a muzzle velocity of mach three. At a rate of seventy per second. It's made to kill tanks with, and is the most powerful aircraft mounted "gun" type weapon in the US military. (Hilarious statistic - it is such a powerful weapon that it recoils 25 percent harder than one of the two jet engines the aircraft has can deliver thrust.)

4. Chapter 4

Caution: these contain spoilers for the second film.

4.1

* * *

><p>"So, anyway," Hiccup continued. "After that, the mad scientist guy shouted something about how this was impossible. You know, standard villain stuff."<p>

Why do all villains talk like that? Toothless asked. _It gets very boring after a while._

"Yeah, well, there's probably classes in it." Hiccup shrugged.

"I suspect Galbatorix has taken a few," Eragon mused. "So, what then?"

Well, I showed up â€" demonstrating just why it wasn't impossible in the slightest. Because, you know, I'd survived.

"It _is_ fun the looks that people get when you turn up, especially when they're not expecting it." Hiccup reached across and scratched Toothless' chin. "I think we've heard every variation of 'Night' 'Fury' 'Get' and 'Down' in existence, though."

Saphira chuckled. _And then?_

"Well, Toothless did the blue thing, and started blowing up his giant robot," Hiccup continued. "Started with the weapons, and worked his way in â€" what is it?"

Eragon lowered his hand. "Blue thing?"

Toothless blinked.

"The blue thing. You know?" Hiccup waved his hands at Toothless. "The blue thing he does? All, 'woosh'?" His arms dropped. "You've seriously never seen the blue thing?"

Neither of us have ever seen the blue thing, Saphira confirmed.

"Man, I thought I showed everyone..."

Actually, now that I think about it... Toothless counted on his claws. _I can think of several people who I'm pretty sure we never thought to show the blue thing to. Usually we were busy, or you were complaining._ A pause. _Actually, usually both._

"Yeah, yeah..." Hiccup shook his head.

Eragon gave them both a look. "Okay, guys. What's the blue thing?"

I guess we'll have to do the blue thing. Toothless grinned. _I do like showing off the blue thing. It's cool._

"Sure, bud, just give me a sec to set the scene." Hiccup frowned. "Okay. We were fighting a big dragon-"

As usual.

"And it hit us with an ice blast."

Less usual.

"I could do without the commentary, Toothless!" Hiccup said, exasperated.

No, you couldn't. Toothless flirted his tail. _I'm the star of this bit anyway._

"Sure, sure. Anyway... then, Toothless did _this_."

Toothless did the blue thing.

The grass around him caught fire.

"Okay, yeah, that's pretty cool," Eragon allowed. "Is it me, or does he look like an off-brand Godzilla now?"

For that insult, I will not spare you when I become ruler of all dragonkind. Instead, I will have three Terrible Terrors steal your left socks.

"Goin' a little mad with power, there?" Hiccup snarked.

I am sane with power. I just have a lot of it.

* * *

<p>4.2 (MLP crossover)<p>

* * *

<p>"â€|what the hay?" Twilight muttered, falling forwards onto her stomach. "Oof!"<p>

"What is it?" A voice that was at once familiar and not familiar asked. "Oh, huh. New looper this time."

"Looper?" she asked, trying to push herself back up again. It hurt.

For one thing, she didn't seem to have hooves any more. "Do you mean time loops?"

"Yeah. You don't look used to human body shape, hold on." The owner of the voice grabbed her arm and pulled her up.

She turned, barely giving her own new body a glance, and saw that the speaker was a green-eyed human. He reminded her (very slightly) of the human boy she'd seen last time, which had been only a few months long before something blew the castle up.

"There you go. Strange. According to this loop's memories, you're my twin sister. Well, welcome to Berk."

"Loop memories?" After a moment, Twilight realized what he meant by the term. This version of her â€" Twit? Seriously? Worst name ever â€" had her own complete set of memories from birth. She remembered growing up on an island full of Vikings, being mocked along with her brother â€" Hiccup â€" for not being Viking enough, and their village being constantly attacked by dragons.

"Wow, that's unusualâ€|" she muttered. "I feel like I know you now."

"Yeah, that's how it works. I take it you're relatively new to the Loops?"

"I've done several hundred!"

Hiccup shrugged. "I'm at over ten thousand, and some of the first generation Loopers have done several million. What's your original name?" Seeing her surprise, he shrugged. "Berk is the only place that could possibly come up with a name as silly as _Twit._ I don't doubt you'd rather use your real one."

"Twilight." She answered, after a moment. "Twilight Sparkle."

"Oh, neat. I took your place last Loop. The others are fine, by the way."

"You did? Huh." Twilight frowned. "So, I'm not used to other loopsâ€| what happens here?"

"Dragon riding, basically." Hiccup reached into his leather jerkin and pulled outâ€| projection equipment?

"I'll give you the 'welcome to the multiverse' talk, if you haven't had it already."

* * *

><p>"Hi, Spike."<p>

The purplish dragon gave a rumbling growl. It sounded peeved.

"Yeah, they can't speak." Hiccup explained for her. "Toothless is telepathic now, but that's the result of a Pern Loop. Fun place, if you ever end up there."

He frowned. "Actually, if it's Spike there too, I wonder how the Loop

would resolve that. Dragons and riders on Pern tend to be same-gender. Anyway, I've got a couple of harness designs that might work for himâ€|"

Spike roared.

* * *

><p>4.3<p>

* * *

><p>"Dad," Hiccup began. "There's some very important things I need to tell you."<p>

"And there's something I need to tell you," Stoic countered.

"Oh, well..." Hiccup shrugged. "You first."

"No, you first."

"No, I really insist you go first." Hiccup gestured.

"Right." Stoic paused. "I'm enrolling you in Dragon Training."

"Okay, that makes this really awkward." Hiccup drew a deep breath. "I've shot down a Night Fury, befriended him, invented a flame sword-" he pulled the sword from his hip, igniting it in a flash of flame, "and we found a lair with a good dragon alpha in it."

Stoic blinked. "You what?"

"Also, I found someone you'll want to meet," Hiccup added, sweeping his arm back towards the door.

Valka stepped through, her helmet off and her countenance anxious. "Stoic?"

Toothless and Cloudjumper stuck their heads through the door behind her, watching.

Stoic's impending explosion was cut off as if with a knife. "...what? Can it be..."

Slowly, with fumbling hands, he reached up and took his helmet off. "After all this time..."

"I know what you're going to say," Valka began. "How could I leave â€ how could I abandon you both... and I don't know. I..."

She sighed. "I was afraid. Of how you'd react. But I don't-"

Stoic raised a hand and cut her off. "Just... tell me this. What you said about dragons... were you right?"

"Yes," she replied, tears starting in her eyes. "Yes, I was. And when my- your- our son appeared out of the night, riding a dragon, I wondered what that meant, and... I don't know-"

Stoic stumbled forward, and knelt. "Then I was wrong, for not listening. And if you did wrong in leaving... then we were both wrong. And-" Stoic shook his head. "If we're going to be wrong, we should be wrong together." He took a deep breath. "Please stay."

Valka's mouth worked for a moment, then she nodded silently. "Of course I will."

Toothless used his tail to pass popcorn, though Cloudjumper just looked at it in bafflement.

"By the way, Dad," Hiccup said, a small smirk playing over his features. "What's your opinion on single combat by champions?"

Stoic turned, looking a bit annoyed at the interruption. "What are you talkin' about? Can't you see your-" his voice caught. "Your mother and I are having a moment?"

"I'll assume yes, then." Hiccup waved. "Be back later!"

He dove through the window. A muffled 'ow!' came through it.

Toothless looked to his left, then back to the scene in the house, then gave a little start of surprise. He dumped the rest of the popcorn on top of Cloudjumper, and loped off towards the window Hiccup had jumped through.

Stoic and Valka exchanged a confused glance. Muffled sounds of a one-sided argument about dratted lizards missing their cues came through the window, accompanied by honks and growls, then a black shape shot past the door.

Valka was the first to speak. "Well, he takes after you..."

"Dragon!" someone shouted outside.

"Night fury, get-"

"We _know!_" a dozen Vikings chorused.

* * *

><p>Ten minutes later, a blue-glowing Night Fury drifted back down through the thermals to land.<p>

"Hi, mom, dad," Hiccup said, stepping off Toothless' back as the latter landed. "I blew up the dragon queen that was sending them to attack us."

Toothless grumbled.

"Okay, _we_ blew up the dragon queen."

Another grumble.

"Mostly Toothless. But I helped!" Hiccup rummaged in his tunic, and pulled out a sewing needle. "I call it drakonsdeath!"

His parents exchanged another set of glances.

"And I assume this bit is him taking after me as well, is it?" Stoic asked.

Valka shook her head. "I've no idea. I don't think either of us is _that_ crazy."

* * *

><p>4.4 (another MLP cross)<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup looked around. "Toothless? Where did you go?"
Seriously, he added over their telepathic link " courtesy of a Pern loop so long ago it felt like they'd never lacked that closer-than-brothers relationship, _what happened to you?_"

A purr came over the link, and a side-bleed of the dragon's emotions. They were so strong " and so sleepy " that Hiccup nearly tripped.

Hey, Hiccup, Toothless eventually said, in the telepathic equivalent of a lazy drawl, _I defect. I'm working for this girl now._

Hiccup finally reached the clearing he'd originally met Toothless in " all those loops ago. However, there was a girl there already with flowers in her hair" and a rather grumpy looking bunny on her shoulder. And she was scratching Toothless under his chin.

"You're a nice one, aren't you? So this is your home loop?"

Toothless nodded happily, begging for more scratches.

* * *

><p>"You must be Fluttershy, then?" Hiccup confirmed. "It's been" whoo, a long time since I last met you guys. Bit more experience with the multiverse since?"

"Yes, thanks." Fluttershy Hofferson stroked Angel Bunny, who waved a carrot warningly at Toothless when he tried to sidle closer. "Twilight told us she met you a few times."

"Yeah" Hiccup shrugged. "Strange thing, she tends to be my sister. Anyway, you seem to have subverted my dragon."

I'm not yours! Toothless replied huffily. _We have a contractual relationship, remember. And there's nothing in there precluding additional riders._

"Yeah, yeah" Hiccup said, stretching. "Man, I'll miss Astrid, though. She's a good girlfriend" if scary."

Fluttershy giggled. "All right. This is your home loop, so how does it work?"

"Basically, we have to teach the village how to become dragon riders. Step one: catch your dragon." Hiccup nodded towards Toothless. "As I'm sure you've noticed, they're suckers for fish, catnip, scritchies or just generally anything that works on a cat. Or a dog."

I prefer to think of it as cats liking what Night Furies do.
Toothless rolled over on his back. _Speaking of whichâ€¦_|_

Hiccup got up and gave his friend a rub. "They _are_ kinda high maintenance at times, but if you get a dragon as a friend they'll last you as long as you deserve. Longer, even."

"Okayâ€¦|" Fluttershy got a speculative look in her eye. "I'll see if I can find a dragon to befriend for myself."

* * *

><p>"Should have guessedâ€¦|" Hiccup shook his head, as the humanized pegasus gave a chin scratch to the latest in a relay of over four hundred dragons.<p>

One of the nadders tried to jump the queue, and an expertly aimed carrot from Angel sent him sprawling backwards to meekly retake his place.

"This is going to look bad at the examâ€¦|"

* * *

><p>"Hi, I'm Astrid. The name means beautiful, which I am, and these are my animal friends." The pegasus gave a sweet smile. "They like me."<p>

Stormfly nodded enthusiastically. The manticore, hydra, cockatrice and ura major exchanged glances, felt their bruises and decided to play along.

"â€¦well, that suggests a way of dealing with Nightmare Moon," Twilight said. "Erâ€¦| what's with the axe?"

"It helps me be friendly," Astrid said.

* * *

><p>Twilight was still unsettled by that "Astrid" pegasus. From what she'd said, it had taken not too long to work out that the foreign Looper was actually one of Hiccup's friends. (Honestly, the dragon should have been a clue.)<p>

Indeed, there were those suggestions that she thought rather more of himâ€¦| though given what she was like, Twilight felt more pity than anything.

"Okay," she said, a slight quaver in her voice as Astrid flipped a battleaxe between her wings, "the next thing that normally happens here is that Fluttershy tries to redeem Discord."

"Oh, _him,_" Astrid said, scowling.

Actually, it had been fascinating to watch her interaction with Discord. He'd turned her into a cringing, zero-confidence weakling who was scared stiff by bad language and had to be rescued out from under her axe.

In other words, basically into Fluttershy.

"Think you could give it a go?" Twilight hazarded, and was rewarded with a scowl.

"Can I, hel! I'll sort him out." Astrid's face set. "Hold on, I need to go get some helpers."

* * *

><p>"You actually released me?" Discord said, looking around. "How strange."<p>

"Yeah, I'll handle this," Astrid said, and strode forward. "Look, goatface. You listen to me, and we're all happy fun time friends."

Discord thought. "Nah. Now-"

She darted up and took hoof-fulls of his hair and beard, dragging him around to look her in the eyes. "I. Wasn't. Finished. Now, the easy way is the way I just described. The fun way is that you don't listen to me."

"What happens then?" Discord said, interested.

Astrid smirked, and beat her rear left hoof on the ground twice.

An Ursa Major, Stormfly, a chimera and a mantichore lumbered into view.

Notably, the Ursa was carrying an axe the size of the town hall.

"Well," Astrid said, catching her own battleaxe as Applejack heaved it over, "in that case then we try what I like to call a trial separation."

"Separation of what?" Pinkie asked brightly. "Did you two get married without telling me?"

"Nah, I was thinking moreâ€¦| head from body."

Discord took careful note of the way Astrid was hefting the battleaxe in one wing. Then, slowly and deliberately, he tracked across the mantichore (which had a tail in strike position), the chimera (all three of whose heads were snarling), the Deadly Nadder (who was in the middle of taking an ominous breath), and finally stopped on the big axe.

"What was that bit about listening to you?"

Astrid let go of his hair, and pouted. "Nobody ever takes the fun wayâ€¦|"

* * *

><p>4.5 (features Hiccup, Eragon and MLP)<p>

* * *

><p>Twilight felt the Loop settling into place around her in a familiar way. Canterlot, just found out about Nightmare Moon, all that jazz.<p>

"Okay, Spike, take a-"â€|

Something was wrong.

"Iâ€| think you might have confused me with someone else," a decidedly _female_ voice said from behind her.

Twilight scanned through her loop memories as she turned to the speaker. As it happened, she was a _blue_ baby dragon.

"â€|oh, hold on," Twilight said, interested. "Are you a new Looper?"

"Well, new to here. Hi, I'm-"

"Saphira, yes," Twilight nodded. The dragon seemed slightly surprised, and Twilight tossed her mane. "Loop memories tend to support a self-consistent reality, and since you're taking the place of my assistant, Spikeâ€| that means I know your name."

"Ah, of course." Saphira nodded. "I'm sorry, we're not very used to fused loops. I think this is only the third or the fourthâ€|"

"Right. Oh, are you the Anchor?"

"No." Saphira paused. "Well, mostly no. My bonded human is, and we have a fairly close empathic bond, so we're hardly ever _not_ both Looping."

"Interestingâ€|" Twilight dashed off a note with magic while she spoke. "Well, we'll see how the first few days of the Loop go, and see if your Anchor is around."

Saphira held up a hand-paw. "No need, my link just started working. He's here. And apparently â€| lacemaker. Well, at least he's good at that." The little dragon carefully hid a good-natured chuckle.

"â€|well, that answers the question of who _he's_ replacing," Twilight said.

* * *

><p>The anchor in question, Eragon, sank back onto a couch in the library. Saphira walked over and sat next to him, and they exchanged a fond look before turning to Twilight.<p>

"Okay. Basically, where we come from, there's this huge empire, then some elves, and rebels."

Twilight nodded.

"My Loop starts right about when the elves try to send a dragon egg
â€" "

"That's me," Saphira said.

"Yes, that's Saphira, to someone who works for the rebels." Eragon looked at Twilight with a sardonic expression. "I'm simplifying just a bit, in case you couldn't tell. Anyway, I pick it up, then miss Blue Scales here hatches out and things get a bitâ€" complicated."

"Complicated meaning," Saphira said with a tart smile, "he and I become the single most valuable bargaining chip in Alagaesia. Dragon riders were the old rulers where we come from, so old Slow Feet here and I are champions and legitimizers all rolled into one â€" and it didn't help that we were both breathtakingly naïve, politically, the first time. Add to _that_ that I'm the only female dragon that entire world knows exists, andâ€" "

Twilight winced.

"So, long story short, we're looking forward to a loop as quiet as we can get."

"Rightâ€" Twilight nodded. "Good news for you there, actually. Princess Celestia and Princess Luna declared Equestria's Loop to be a sanctuary. You can have your quiet loop." Then she paused. "By the wayâ€" what's with the lace?"

Eragon shot a glance at Saphira, who held up her hand-paws. "Guilty, guilty, I accept full responsibility."

"You'll pay for that," he warned, and she grinned. "Anyway, it's actually how we fund the Varden â€" that's the rebel group. Magic is costly of energy, more costly than doing the same thing by non-magical means, but it's perfect for finicky detail work."

"So you work for the rebels?"

"Sometimes." He stretched his forelegs out on the couch. "Sometimes I try the Empire, sometimes the Elves, sometimes I go my own way. It's a right bear trying to make my world actually work out."

* * *

><p>"Wellâ€" Spike said, looking down. "I didn't expect this."<p>

The alabaster dragon about the size of a small cat gave a wing-flipping shrug in response.

"Hey, join the club," Hiccup said. "I get about one loop in fifty where I'm the dragon, these days."

"Huh." Spike snapped his fingers, summoning his lightsaber. "Well, I might need _this_â€" anyway, where's Toothless?"

"Officially, he's dead. Unofficiallyâ€¦" Hiccup opened his jacket, revealing a six-inch fire lizard hanging from the inner lining.

Hey, Toothless broadcast on a broad band. _You wanna buy a dragon?_

* * *

><p>4.6<p>

* * *

><p>Drago swept his staff around. Once, twice. Then pointed it at the alpha.<p>

And the sea roiled, and a _second_ Bewilderbeest rose from the waves.

It ponderously walked up the beach, feet crunching, and advanced towards Valka's alpha.

Then a blur of black and brown shot past, flared wings, and alighted between the Bewilderbeests.

Toothless shrugged his head, and Hiccup got off. "Go get 'im, bud," he said, and headed for cover.

Both huge dragons looked down at the relatively tiny interloper.

Toothless glanced back at the white alpha, and flashed him a grin. _I got this_, his expression said.

Then he turned to the dark alpha, and frowned. _This_ expression promised pain.

It was met by a roar, and the dark alpha focused his will on Toothless.

Ergh... Toothless winced. _I forgot how strong this bastard was._

Hiccup's mind reached out to his. _I'm here, bud. You're not alone. You never will be._

Never, Toothless confirmed. _No matter where, no matter when._

Their minds linked, and the alpha command rolled off like water.

Right.

The Night Fury looked up, and grinned at the Bewilderbeest. _Shall we get to the actual fight, now?_

His teeth snapped back in.

Then he inhaled, and spat a globe of green fire.

* * *

><p>Valka and Stoic peered over the rock they'd ducked behind, as the huge green explosion faded away.<p>

"...wait," Stoic frowned, raising himself up to look at the scene of the battle. "Where'd Drago's dragon go?"

Valka raised her helm. "I... don't know..."

"Did Toothless just blow him up?" Stoic gaped, then grinned. "That's my son's dragon, all right!"

"Yeah," Gobber said meditatively. "But Toothless is a lot less humble of a beastie."

A second bolt of green flame slashed across the beach, hit a gaping Drago, and consumed him in a perfectly-sized fireball.

* * *

><p>Who's awesome? Toothless asked, prancing in front of the scorch mark. _I'm awesome!_

The white alpha looked down at his unexpected champion, then slowly knelt.

Toothless turned. _Oh, get up... hey, I fancy an ice cream_. He switched to wide-broadcast. _Anyone else want an ice cream?_

Several of the Berk dragons raised their forelegs.

Right. That's five snow cones, to go.

The Bewilderbeest nodded, and began gently breathing ice.

* * *

><p>With a flicker of blue light that grew rapidly to a crash, several thousand tonnes of dragon landed in the middle of a desert.

As an afterthought, Drago materialized. Upside down. On top of the Bewilderbeest's left tusk, with his cloak caught on the tip.

Unseen on the top of a nearby dune, Gobber's Terror snapped a photograph.

* * *

><p>"Post?" Astrid asked, that evening. "Did Toothless seriously just defeat Drago's alpha with an ability designed to deliver the post?"

"Yep." Hiccup threw a sugar cube, which Toothless incinerated in mid-air with a blue double-flash. The next cube was salt, which was a bright orange. "What's wrong with doing it that way?"

Astrid shrugged. "Nothing much."

* * *

><p>4.7 (Yes, Hiccup is in this one.)<p>

* * *

><p>Twilight opened her eyes, and easily recognized one of the things which was clearly... a little off, about this loop.<p>

Right, let's see...

Point one: she was human â€" to be precise, a young child. Not all that odd, but... notable, still.

Point two: none of the other Elements were around.

And point three: her loop memories had a severe overtone of phobia. For _horses_, of all things.

Okay, I'm a princess. Princess? No, small-p. The heir. But the heir presumptive, not the heir in law, interesting. Why? I'm not a Herald. Mother â€" the Queen â€" is. And it's interesting that she's Queen Celestia, I must check if she's Awake.

Heralds have Companions â€" magical horses, I think. I don't know much about that. Why am I scared of them?

To the child she was Replacing, it wouldn't have been at all obvious exactly what was behind the phobia. But to Twilight herself, with many years effectively spent as a politician... it was blatantly clear.

My nurse. Hulda.

Nothing to be done for now, except to get dressed and ready for the day. Whoever it was Twilight was taking the place of was a truly astonishing brat... that, at least, was easy to fix.

* * *

><p>Twilight stepped smartly out of her room, wincing internally at the cautious look a servant gave her.<p>

"Ah, your royal highness," Hulda said, walking up with a hint of surprise. "You're up very early. And did you dress yourself?"

"I did, Hulda," Twilight replied, with a carefully judged hint of deference.

"Well, you're forgetting yourself, your highness. After all, you don't have to dress yourself â€" that's what servants are for."

This woman was setting Twilight's teeth on edge. She had been carefully and deliberately moulding the young princess into a disaster of a girl and even worse of a potential ruler.

She did wonder why Celestia â€" or whoever Celestia was replacing â€" hadn't caught it yet, but the answer was simple enough. Chronic overwork, like usual.

At least Celestia had the comfort of her Companion, this Loop. A large, robust mare whose coat was so dark that Twilight easily made the connection with Luna.

* * *

><p>"Hulda?" Twilight asked, curiously. "Why do you keep giving my other nurse that drink?"<p>

"It's medicine," Hulda said shortly. "Come on, you have to-"

"But if it's medicine, why are you using magic to make her take it?"

Hulda jerked as if stung, and Twilight fought down a grin.
Gotcha!

"Don't be silly," the nurse said eventually. "Magic! You're imagining things."

"But I saw you cast the spell..." Twilight trailed off with artful uncertainty.

At that point, the door opened.

"Hello, Mother," Twilight said, standing. "Did you know Hulda can do magic? She's so clever."

Celestia drew a slim sword. "So, you must be the accomplice."

"Accomplice?" Twilight parroted, slightly surprised at Celestia's willingness to draw steel.

Hulda swore.

Twilight's hand crackled with electricity as she launched forward a stun spell, which smashed through a hastily raised shield and stunned the mage.

"Well, I suppose that answers the question of whether or not you're Awake..." Celestia said, lowering the sword as guards rushed into the room. "A very nice touch, by the way."

"Thanks," Twilight said, smiling. "I think the person I've Replaced may have been supposed to have had a bit of magical talent herself."

Both of them paused.

"That wasn't very easy on the tongue, was it..." Celestia remarked critically.

"If I said she was sidestined to have magic, then you'd have not understood me," Twilight retorted. "I did invent this whole set of extra tenses, you know... Anyway, how did you know that fast?"

"Give me credit," Celestia said, sitting down on one of the chairs in the royal nursery. "One of my counsellors here was working against

me. It took me a few hours to spot it, but they have a lovely spell here called the Truth spell. We should try to learn it..."

Twilight's notebook seemed to teleport into her hands (which wasn't a surprise, because it did.) "Truth spell? How much of a truth spell?"

"Two levels. First level detects falsehood, second level forces truth." Celestia smiled. "I suppose it might be a good one to teach Applejack."

Twilight nodded, scribbling away. "Is Luna Awake?"

"Yes, and complaining â€" a lot!" Celestia grinned, then shrugged. "Okay, Twilight, I'll go make sure the country's running properly. Fair warning â€" we've got our work cut out for us here, this place isn't a great power like Equestria is and it has more enemies. That's why I went for the sword â€" I may as well start as I'll have to go on."

Twilight nodded soberly.

It was hard to accept, sometimes, that there were Loops where friendship really couldn't fix anything. Not coincidentally, they often coincided with the Loops where Twilight was forced into human body shape and out of touch with most of her power.

* * *

><p>"Well, hello!" a familiar voice said, as Twilight plonked yet another book on the finished pile.<p>

She turned. "Wait, is that _Hiccup?_"

"Exactly," Hiccup said, strolling in. "We're seeing a lot of one another lately... I'm the Queen's Own, by the way. That basically means-"

"You have about the same job I did in my home Loop," Twilight finished for him.

"Just about." Hiccup sat down opposite her. "Any good books?"

Twilight pointed to one of them. "Good story, interesting ideas for what to try out later this Loop. Did you let Celestia know you're Looping?"

"Oh, is she one of yours? And Awake?"

Twilight nodded, and Hiccup frowned.

"Well, great. She must have been laughing at me all through our meeting... anyway. Toothless is here, too, but he's a Companion."

"So is Luna."

"Bet she's taking it better, though." Hiccup leaned back in his

chair. "It's all moan whine complain I preferred wings."

* * *

><p>Twilight watched as something pulsed in the Grove. By the looks of things, she was about to get a Companion...<p>

What in the name of me? A familiar mental voice asked.

Twilight blinked. "Dash?"

Oh, well spotted... Dash's mental tone was a bit snippy. _Now, why am I an earth pony horse?_

"I assume it's the rules here."

Rules, ha! At least I'm still blue.

* * *

><p>Twilight looked up, frowning.<p>

"What is it?" Celestia asked.

"Oh, I just have a... suspicion, about that mission you sent Hiccup on. You know, to that country next door?"

"I assure you, I know the one." Celestia said, then tapped her chin. "I wonder what it could be..."

With a flicker of movement, Toothless â€" dragon, not Companion â€" materialized overhead. There were several gasps of surprise, and at least one Herald went for their bow before Twilight and Celestia could tell them to stand down.

"That was _not_ fun," Hiccup said, shaking his head. "Hey, did you know the crown prince of that place is a blood mage? Well, I say is... more like was."

"What did you do?" Twilight asked.

Toothless burped.

"Oh, shut up," Hiccup said with a grin. "No, Toothless _didn't_ eat him. We did blow him up a bit, though."

"How do you blow someone up a bit?" Celestia asked, concealing a grin.

I only got his trousers, Toothless explained.

Twilight steadied herself as Dash began laughing.

"So, what happens now?" Hiccup asked. "I mean, I've got a few ideas, but you're the one in charge. Apparently."

"Thank you." Celestia closed her eyes for a moment, and Luna beneath her rolled _her_ eyes at some unheard comment.

"Right. Twilight, how are you doing at adapting your magic

here?"

"Not as well as I could be..." Twilight shrugged. "The magic system here is kind of bizarre, all lines and nodes. But in an emergency I can pull off a work-around."

"Please do." Celestia pointed towards Ancar's kingdom. "I would like you and Hiccup to give us magical fire support. Non lethal, of course. I think it's time for a bit of an invasion."

"Fair enough." Twilight snapped her fingers, and produced a small bracelet with a coin, like an ancient Athenian Drachma, dangling from it. "Okay, OWL. Set up."

The coin flashed, and reshaped into a baton. Set up. Good morning, mistress.

"Oh, hey, you have got an Intelligent Device," Hiccup said, interested. "I did wonder..."

"I hardly ever use him because he's a bit of a crutch," Twilight admitted. "It's more interesting to reverse engineer Nanoha's spells to fit my own personal magical abilities. But since I haven't got my personal magic working here yet..."

"I agree." Hiccup nodded. "I, on the other hand, have had Raising Dragon for quite a while."

Wait, Dash mindspoke slowly. Does this mean we're going to be the horse archers from Tartarus?

"Pretty much," Twilight replied. "Owl, arbalest form."

Arbalest mode engaged.

* * *

><p>Ancar put his head in his hands. "Where did it all go wrong?"<p>

"That would be when you declared war on Valdemar, sire," his chief advisor said helpfully.

The mage-king had nearly enough time to start throttling his chief advisor, but then the wall exploded inwards and the whole issue became sort of moot.

* * *

><p>"Well, that was fun," Hiccup said. "What now?"<p>

"Now we relax... unless there's something else out there to be a problem," Twilight replied. "I for one am looking forward to more than five years of continuous research without a political job."

"Actually," Celestia said, voice wheedling. "I do have quite a lot of paperwork, and the heir should be experienced at--"

"No." Twilight held up a hand, flat with the palm. "Not interested,

not listening. I'm going to go research how magic works here."

The Queen shook her head. "If you're sure..."

"Look, you've got Hiccup and Toothless to draw on. They're older than me. By, well, a few thousand loops, I think..."

"Stop trying to draw me into this," Hiccup replied. "Hey, I wonder if I can pass Toothless off as a really big bird? I want into the Hawkbrothers."

Bawk bawk? Toothless tried. _It doesn't really fit me..._

* * *

><p>4.8<p>

* * *

><p>"Right, this looks vaguely familiar," Twilight said, looking out over the deep coniferous forests cloaking the mountain behind her. As a precaution, since she was human, she withdrew OWL's current chassis from her pocket and slipped the bracelet onto her wrist. "But where from?"<p>

Footfalls sounded behind her.

"I assume you're Awake?" a voice said from behind her.

"Yep," she replied, turning. "Oh, right, of course. This is Berk, right?"

"That's right, yeah." Hiccup nodded. "Looks baseline so far, except that you're here, and... huh."

"What?"

In answer, a little black fire-lizard about a foot long flashed into being between them.

"Toothless isn't his normal size," Hiccup explained, holding his arm out for his sort-of-co-anchor. "That certainly means something's up. Not sure what, though."

Twilight thought a bit, then shrugged. "Oh well. Any ideas?"

"Yeah, actually..." Hiccup paused. "How would you feel about staging a bout of divine visitation? If the village thinks we're favoured by..."

"I think just the ones who are our loop patrons, actually," Twilight suggested. "It's easier."

"Sounds good. Wonder how I'll explain Framherja, though, I was going to go for Thor." Hiccup shrugged. "I'll think of something."

"Framherja?" Twilight asked. "I'm not familiar with the name..."

"Oh, right. Framherja is a bow I pick up in a variant loop. It took _ages_, but I finally managed to get her properly soul-bound." Putting action to words, he held out his hand and a _gorgeous_ golden bow flashed into being.

"Until then I had to rely on her being my standard-issue legendary weapon. She's basically partially sentient," he explained. "Sort of like your Device â€" Owl, I think?"

"Oh, is that the one you used in Valdemar? And yes, that's right."

A roar echoed over the valleys of the island.

"Toothless?" Hiccup asked, a note of command in his voice.

Two. Large â€" my normal size. The little dragon was looking up and into the distance. _They're... oh, right. I think this is who's filling in the Night Fury slot._

Toothless' mental tone was mildly aggrieved. _That's my gig._

"Not this time." Hiccup raised the arm holding Toothless in an expansive gesture. "You can be the sarcastic one who constantly throws barbs at us and never has to do any work."

I like this new gig.

The two Furies were now close enough for the humans to see them. Hiccup casually fingered Framherja's string â€" not intending to draw, precisely, just not wanting to be caught off guard if he _had_ to draw.

Then, with a rush of wind, they both landed heavily down-slope.

"Hi!" a cheerful voice called.

"Spike?" Twilight checked. "Nice to see you here. Wait... is that-"

"Indeed it is, dear." Seeing a thirty foot Night Fury speak with Rarity's voice was slightly strange, to say the least. "Well, this is convenient."

"Might not be all that convenient in the future," Twilight warned. "I suspect you'll end up being my dragon for the loop."

Rarity considered this. "Things have been worse."

"True." Twilight turned back to her (for this loop, anyway) twin brother. "What was that you were saying about faking divine favour?"

This is going to be good, Toothless opined.

* * *

><p>4.9<p>

* * *

><p>"Order, order!" Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III called, banging a warhammer on a tent peg in lieu of a gavel. "I'd like to call the Multiversal Union of Dragons, Riders And Associated Loopers to... some sort of order..."<p>

Good luck, Toothless 'pathed.

"You're not helping, fishbreath."

Slowpoke.

"Scaleface â€" I'm not helping, am I?" Hiccup said, sheepishly.

"Not especially, no," Spike contributed.

"Okay. So, we've got a few new faces, now, so I think we should go around the table and introduce ourselves."

Toothless rolled his eyes. _Toothless, also Tannluth if the loop feels particularly original. I carry this lump around._

"And I'm Hiccup Horrendous Haddock. The third. Yes, I've heard all the jokes." Hiccup sighed. "Next?"

"I am Twoflower, of the Discworld," a bespectacled man said with a smile. "I'd love a photo, by the way â€" oh, sorry, I'm rambling, aren't I..."

I am Ninereeds. Twoflower is my human.

"One question, by the way," Twoflower raised a finger. "Why are we the MUDRAAL?"

"Because I couldn't work out a way to spell out DRAGON," Hiccup admitted. "Next?"

"Fallarnon of Benden â€" F'lar, usually," the next human in the circle said. "I ride bronze Mnementh, the largest dragon Pern has ever produced... apart from his mate."

Sometimes, Mnementh broadcast calmly.

The next to speak was a human of slightly under average height, with close-cropped brown hair. "Hal Kailas of Kalabas. I suppose I should say all the guff about Dragonmaster, but I'm not bothered in the slightest. My dragon is Storm here."

Storm rumbled, amused.

"Yes, I know he can't communicate intelligibly," Hal added. "I'm a dragon empath, which apparently in this circle isn't all that special."

Spike shrugged. "I'm a jedi. Does that count?"

"Probably. Hells, I don't know." Kailas shook his head.

"Captain William Laurence," the next human said with a smart nod. "Temeraire here is my closest friend and dear companion."

"And occasional mount, of course," Temeraire smiled. "It is no burden at all, Laurence."

Kailas looked him over. "Military man?"

"Navy first, then dragoncorps," Laurence confirmed.

"Mind a talk afterwards?"

"Not at all. Later, though, as you say."

"I'm Jack Morgan," a young teen volunteered. "Draycos is a K'Da, which basically means he's a shapeshifting dragon tattoo. I don't know either."

Draycos waved, briefly extending from his hosts' back.
"Greetings."

"Right, who's left..." Hiccup blinked. "Wait a second. Why is she here?"

"She is my wife," Spike pointed out.

"Spike carries me sometimes," Rarity defended. "Doesn't that count?"

"Well, I suppose." Hiccup shrugged helplessly.

"Okay. My name is Rarity. I am usually a unicorn, and am married to Spykoranuvellitar here."

Spike blushed. "And that's me. I'm usually a baby dragon in my loop, but Twilight â€" my Anchor â€" and I worked out how to do size shifting some time ago."

"Farren'd love this..." Kailas muttered, seemingly to himself.

Storm made a noise which sounded like a chuckle.

"Okay. Now, we're all here on Berk, which is my home loop." Hiccup laid out a map. "Priority one: how to confuse my relatives, while ending up riding dragons."

"I may have a few ideas..." the new looper, Kailas, mused. "How does anyone feel about dragonriders armed with repeating crossbows?"

The rest of them considered that.

"Okay, what is your world like?" Hiccup asked, blinking.

"Magical world war one with no weapon more advanced than a crossbow," Kailas replied grimly. "I invented strategic bombardment, aerial combat, lost almost all my friends and defeated a demonic invasion from another dimension."

"Okay, ouch," Spike opined. "We need to get you a light and fluffy loop, stat. Hey, dear?"

Rarity looked up, caressing his claw. "Yes?"

"I have a plan."

* * *

><p>"You can't send him away!" the most beautiful teenage girl in the village said, in tears. "I love him!"<p>

"But..." her father, a standard issue Viking warrior, looked up with a dumbfounded expression. "He's a _dragon._"

"So?" Rarity replied. "Besides, he loves me as well. We're going to elope if you don't let him stay!"

* * *

><p>Three to two that someone tries to attack Spike,
Toothless suggested.

"Like I'm going to let you win _more_ money off me," Hiccup replied sarcastically. "What do you even need it for?"

I have my reasons. And I am totally not saving up for a Jacuzzi.

* * *

><p>4.10<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup carefully hammered out the last dents in a shield. "Okay, number 21's done!"<p>

Astrid walked over, and picked up the shield. "Thanks, Hiccup."

"Any time." Hiccup winked at her, and she grinned back.

It was good to be back at the start of a loop. Full of possibilities.

Speaking of which...

"Number 24, I'm ready for you!"

The four or five vikings still queued outside the smithy examined their chitties, frowning.

Then someone shouted the age old cry, the one that announced that everyone should get down, because there was a Night Fury.

Toothless trotted briskly along the main street, tail wagging and a chitty clutched delicately between two of his retractable teeth.

"_There_ you are," Hiccup said, opening the side door. "I was wondering how long you'd be."

Toothless stopped in front of the door, and deposited his piece of painted wood on the counter.

"That all looks in order." Hiccup gestured for the dragon to enter, and Toothless did so.

The crowd watched with growing incredulity as Hiccup pulled out a wrought-iron file and went to work on the terrible beast's front claws.

Giving him a manicure.

"Dear me, this is filthy," Hiccup commented. "What have you been doing with them?"

Toothless honked and gestured with his tail.

"Well, yeah, I know, but in summer?"

More growls and gestures.

"They do say it only grows on the north side. Right, that's that one done. Other paw." Hiccup examined the proffered limb, then pulled out an awl. "Okay, there's something stuck in this one."

Toothless hissed in pain as Hiccup probed with the awl, then a length of thin cord, and finally a very small drill.

"Got it!" he announced, holding up a battleaxe.

"Oh, neat." Astrid reached over and collected it. "I wondered where that had gone. Thanks!"

"My pleasure," Hiccup replied. At a warning glare from Toothless, he sighed. "Okay, our pleasure. Okay, big guy, you're done."

Toothless rolled back upright, and rummaged under his wing. Pulling out a sack, he plonked down three silver coins.

"Oh, hang on..." Hiccup shook his head. "Price has gone up. Three silver and two copper."

The Night Fury stared at him, then made an angry blart sound.

"I don't set the prices!" Hiccup retorted. "It's the special equipment, see. I keep having to make new files."

Roar-hiss.

"It's written over the door!"

Grumble.

"Fine, then. One copper." Hiccup rolled his eyes, as a beaming Toothless deposited a single extra copper coin on the countertop. "Ya thieving reptile."

Toothless shrugged, then launched himself skywards.

* * *

><p>4.11<p>

Bilbo Baggins sighed. "Okay, what this time?"

The tall woman wearing a travelling cloak winked at him. "I am Leah the Clear, and I wish to recruit you on a-"

"Yes, yes, we've all been here before." Bilbo opened the door fully. "I assume you're an Anchor?"

"Yep." Leah walked in, and put her staff down. "Nice place."

"Thank you," Bilbo replied. "Tea?"

"Oh, yes _please._"

* * *

><p>"So," Bilbo asked, some time later. "What else is different? Or have you not gotten word yet?"<p>

"Oh, I have." Leah smiled mysteriously. "I invited them early, by the way."

The door thudded.

* * *

><p>"Hi," a short, cloaked figure said. "I'm Spike, and he's Storm."<p>

The other figure waved.

Throwing back their cloaks, the two small dragons made a bee-line for Bilbo's pantry.

The Hobbit sighed. He was used to it, really he was... it's just that it got trying, sometimes.

* * *

><p>"Toothless and Draycos," the next pair introduced themselves. "We heard there was food?"<p>

"But we already ate," Draycos added.

"Oh." Bilbo blinked. "That's... actually quite a new experience."

"We wouldn't say no to dessert, though..."

"Of course you wouldn't."

"Don't worry!" Leah's voice drifted through the building. "I've got some spare in my pocket!"

* * *

><p>"I'm Anne,"<p>

"Julian,"

"And I'm Dick," the last of the three added. "I say, your manners are impeccable!"

"Why, thank you," Bilbo allowed. "I do try."

"Just tea for us," Anne added. "It wouldn't be polite to impose."

* * *

><p>"Pray, allow us to enter your fine abode, sir," the ninth visitor asked, gesturing to his two companions. "I am Corporal Temeraire, and these are Saphira and Spyro."<p>

"The one who's not a jerk," Spyro supplied.

"Actually, that doesn't help tell you apart in the slightest," Saphira pointed out, chuckling.

"...fine, then. Come in come in..."

* * *

><p>When Bilbo finally got a chance to head to the table, it was to see one werewolf-mage and a round dozen dragons around the table.<p>

"Er..." he muttered under his breath. "I think I missed letting you two in..."

We let ourselves in, a mellifluous mental voice supplied. _I am Mnementh, and my compatriot is Ninereeds._

"You know," Bilbo said, mostly to the air. "I'm getting a sinking feeling about this..."

* * *

><p>"Evening, little hobbit," the final arrival said. "So, this is where you live."<p>

"Don't torch it next time," Bilbo warned. "Or I'll get Gandalf to flood your lair."

"Don't be so confrontational," Smaug Golden-Scale smiled. "We're all allies here."

"Yeah, about that..."

* * *

><p>"And so," Leah concluded, spoiling the effect a bit with a giggling fit, "these thirteen drakes-"<p>

"_Twelve_ drakes," Saphira interrupted.

"My apologies... _twelve_ drakes and one dragoness were thrown out of their lair by... this."

Leah put a picture on the table.

Bilbo stared for a moment. "...you have got to be having me on."

"No, it's all true," Spike supplied, sniggering himself. "Thirteen dragons thrown out of Erebor by a gigantic mecha-dwarf."

After a few more seconds, Bilbo turned around. "I'm going back to bed."

4.12

"What's goin' on?" Ruffnut asked, hurrying over to the others on the edge of the arena.

"Don't know," Tuffnut replied. "Dink."

Astrid waved her hand, preventing the twins from exploding. "Quiet, guys. I'm trying to hear."

"What's under the blankets?" Snotlout muttered.

The others looked at the gently heaving blankets, each of which was concealing an object of indistinct shape. They varied wildly in size, and at least one of them was very spiky.

* * *

><p>"So," Gobber said, rubbing his hand against his pickaxe. "What were you looking for?"<p>

Hiccup considered, paying no attention to his classmates up top. "I'm not sure, actually. What do you have?"

"Ah!" Gobber swept the first cloth off, revealing a dragon beneath. "The Gronkle. Great power-to-weight ratio, easily refuelled, a bit slow but can be fitted with a towbar with no loss of speed whatsoever."

"Hmmm..." Hiccup examined Meatlug. "I'm not sure, really. I was after something a bit... faster? Are you sure this one can fly?"

"Absolutely! But, well, the customer is always right. Let's see now."

The second, smallest, cloth was swept aside. "This is our kit model. You get six Terrible Terrors, and it's your choice how you make them into a way to get around. You could train 'em to carry a basket if you wanted!"

Two of the Terrors started fighting over a scrap of cloth. The others just snored.

"How's the fuel consumption?" Hiccup asked, stroking his smooth chin.

"Pretty good." Gobber shrugged. "Only downside is, you have to feed them all at once or they won't start again. Too busy fighting over the food."

Hiccup tapped one, which burped. "I don't think much of the air pressure."

"Well, you can always pump 'em up yourself." Gobber shrugged. "I think this is looking like a no?"

"Pretty much." Hiccup walked past the Terrors. "Next?"

"Ah. This is a real beast." The spikiest cloth went the way of the first two. "The Monstrous Nightmare! Very high performance, large fuel tank, a bit prone to catch fire, but â€" well, in a crash you're screwed anyway." Gobber tapped one of Hookfang's fangs, and he duly caught fire. "Plus, very useful for night flying. Comes with a free asbestos saddle and fire extinguisher."

Hiccup tapped his scorched eyebrows. "I think something a little less spiky might work better."

"Oh, not a convertible man?" Gobber nodded, understandingly. "Well, if you'd prefer one of the big models, get a load of the SUV!"

The fourth cloth came off.

"Two driving positions, just in case you end up in Angle-land and have to change sides. Special hybrid fuel system, catalytic converter, a little smelly but you don't notice it when you're in the air." Gobber pointed to the two heads. "Plus, a little extra feature in case you're being followed â€" there's an option to dump some fuel and set light to it! Blows them away!"

Barf belched out a cloud of noxious green smoke. Belch blinked, then plunged his head into a bucket of water as a precaution.

"It's a nice model, but I don't really need all the extra space." Hiccup examined his hands. "What might work best is... something mid-size, perhaps."

"Ah! Look no further."

Stormfly's cloth came off. "Look at that colour! Limited edition, you know. And all original furnishings!"

Four spikes clattered off the arena wall.

"-_some_ original furnishings, at any rate." Gobber coughed. "Quite manoeuvrable, all mod cons, lots of optional extras, and I'll throw in three years warranty and a stereo."

Hiccup walked forwards, testing the saddle leather. He absently scratched Stormfly's neck as she bent around to follow him.

"We're getting there," he said eventually. "Definitely an option. I like the colours especially. Just â€" do you have anything faster?"

Gobber sighed. "I should have known. You're a rich teenager, of course you're going to want the blinged out one."

He pulled the final cloth aside, revealing Toothless doing the blue

thing.

"Great suspension, spoiler, lowered undercarriage, blue decals, and only twenty thousand miles on the clock." Gobber chuckled as Hiccup walked over. "Ah, looks like we've found the one!"

"What's the performance like?" Hiccup asked, testing the harness on Toothless as well.

"Nought to sixty in... dunno," Gobber said, frowning. "Nought to two hundred in bloody-hell-that-was-quick, top speed is ridiculous, and can go for days on a full tank. Six months breakdown coverage, and half off fish for the next year."

Hiccup hesitated.

"Plus I'll throw in a toaster."

The young Viking nodded, and dropped a bag that went _clang_ when it hit the floor. "Deal."

Gobber threw him a pair of keys. Toothless made two quick crooning blips, and crouched down to let Hiccup get on.

"Enjoy!"

* * *

><p>AN:<p>

I know it's been a while. I've been writing other loop stuff - like the MLP Loops, which have positively exploded in size.

>And then I watched the latest film last Sunday...
A fair number of these are from the MLP Loops. I went through and plucked out the ones in which Hiccup featured in a major way.

>4.1: The blue thing! Seriously, that was awesome. But, because Hiccup and Toothless are complete snarkballs, they give it an underblown name.
4.2: Shortly after the first Friendship is Magic crossover loop.

>4.3: Overachiever.
4.4: They do, indeed, have a contractual relationship. Solely for situations like this. Also, Astrid is a sweet girlfriend... but scary as all get out when she's angry.

>4.5: Mostly not about Hiccup, but that last bit hopefully qualifies.
4.6: When Toothless has his tail fin, he doesn't need Hiccup to fly. But they work together anyway, since they're stronger together.

>4.7: Hiccup as the Queen's Own Herald. Oh, dear. (The setting is Valdemar)
4.8: Toothless gets all the best gigs.

>4.9: He's a good organizer. (Sadly, a few weren't able to make it.)
4.10: His money's as good as anyone else's.

>4.11: If you're wondering why Smaug is so conciliatory, it happened over in the MLP Loops. Also, meet Leah Clearwater. She used to have... issues.
4.12: Gobber the Honest's Top Of The Range Dragon Showroom.

5. Chapter 5

Caution: these contain spoilers for the second film.

* * *

><p>5.1<p>

Hiccup blinked, and stretched.

Morning, Toothless!

Well, it wasn't quite morning. Actually, it was the middle of the afternoon. But, what with the fact it was a new loop... it was morning to Hiccup.

Toothless?

No reply met his searching mind, and he frowned. That might be bad news-

Horns blew, and he jumped aside as a collapsible ballista rumbled past. The warrior pushing it slammed it into a cupola built into the edge of a cliff, and extended the sides of it. "Number three, ready!"

"Number four, ready!" echoed back from another part of Berk.

Hiccup looked around, noticing for the first time the heavy " and _different " fortifications compared to usual. They were much larger, with bolt-throwers and cable-launchers and trebuchets, and there were also loopholes hewn into the very rock of the island.

Deciding to get some answers, he headed for the smithy.

* * *

><p>"Identified!" Fishlegs said, slapping a card down on the table. "Nightmare. Strike class, level six. Eight hundred metres long."<p>

"That's the biggest yet," Stoic muttered grimly. "All hands to stations!"

"Stoic," Gobber interrupted. "We've got to use it."

"I thought you said it wasn't finished," Stoic countered.

"If we don't do _something_ I won't get a chance to finish!" Gobber replied. "We need it. We need Hiccup."

Stoic gave his old friend a look.

"I know, he's your son," Gobber allowed. "But he's no good on the fighting line, and he _is_ good at this!" The smith sighed. "He designed the thing, mostly, anyway. If anyone can use it, it's him."

The chief slammed a fist into the stone wall, leaving a crater. "...Fine!"

* * *

><p>Hiccup found himself ushered down a series of winding tunnels into the depths of Berk. Neither his father nor Gobber offered any explanation, and the din of battle " with what didn't seem like a normal dragon attack " had long since receded into the distance.<p>

"Here," Stoic said eventually, turning a key. Gobber turned another one, and the door finally swung open.

Revealing a cavern, which opened onto the outside air just feet above the waterline.

Inside the cavern were a pile of smithy tools, two large carts full of metal and coal, a forge, and...

Hiccup blinked. What looked for all the world like an F-23. Complete, except for one missing rudder.

"Go on, get in!" Gobber encouraged. "Quick! The dragon's already attacking, and we need you in the cockpit!"

At that point, Hiccup's delayed loop memories started to filter in.

"...okay," he said, absently parsing the memories, and climbed in.

* * *

><p>Drift engaged, a voice said.

...cup? Hiccup? Ah, hello.

I should have known, Hiccup replied, grinning as their familiar mental link reengaged. _Did I seriously build you in a cave this loop?_

With a box of scraps, yes. There was the mental equivalent of a shrug, complete with digitally flipped ear. _Shall we?_

Engines roared to life.

* * *

><p>I'm trying to work out what exactly happened to this loop, Hiccup informed Toothless as they blazed up from sea level.

Oh? Toothless asked. As he did so, the nose of the fighter split in the middle to reveal a blue-glowing plasma cannon. _Any ideas?_

Yep. Hiccup feathered the left engine, compensating for the missing rudder, and they swung in to attack. _Basically, you're a Jeager, I'm a pilot, and this is North Sea Rim._

The plasma cannon blazed, and blew a spine off the colossal dragon. It roared, turning from Berk to follow them as they headed north.

The only thing I'm still wondering is if this is going to be How To Train Your Kaiju...

You want my opinion? Toothless certainly didn't, volunteering it before Hiccup could answer. _Give it a try anyway. I want to see Stoic's face if you come back with me parked on that thing's nose._

* * *

><p>5.2<p>

"Well, it's pretty much an empty world."

Looks like, Toothless replied, looking out over the vista below them.

They were at the top of a huge escarpment, sliding down at a steep angle and nearly mirror-bright for a hundred feet before it shallowed and became covered with scree. It continued, though gradually shallowing, for fully half a mile down-slope before finally levelling out into a broad river valley in which a herd of _something_ grazed.

The shimmering river was braided into half a dozen streams, and Hiccup felt his palms itch with wanderlust as he traced one of them â€" left, then right, crisscrossing back and forth across the floodplain, before it vanished into the haze. A distant thundering sounded like there was a waterfall further downriver.

Not a sign of anyone else within hundreds of miles. If the place is inhabited at all.

"Yep." Hiccup glanced back at their â€" totalled â€" spacecraft. "What do _you_ think the odds are of someone else finding that very same wormhole?" A pause. "And surviving the trip?"

Pre-tty low. Toothless flipped his tail nonchalantly. _After all, I was driving. Anyone else wouldn't be so good._

"Fair point."

They sat, looking over the beautiful, pristine landscape. Hiccup rummaged in his pocket for a pair of electrobinoculars, and focused them forwards.

"Looks like this place is a graben."

Geshundeit.

"No, I mean a valley with escarpments on both sides. I can just about see the other wall. It's a rift valley, pretty much."

Right. Toothless paused. _I knew that._

"Of course ya did."

Silence returned for another few minutes.

Well, if we're stuck here...

"We're not fooling anyone, bud." Hiccup mentally inventoried what he had in his pocket. "Shall we go for the mark five?"

Sure, it's comfortable. Toothless crouched down, and let Hiccup start fitting the familiar leather and metal buckles. _I expect hazard pay._

"Works for me. You get a half share," Hiccup replied without missing a beat.

Is that all I'm worth to you?

"No, it's all I'm paying you." Hiccup tightened a strap, waited a second, then pulled it a hair closer. "Check that, would you?"

Toothless stood, and shook himself to an accompaniment of jingling metal. _Feels fine._

"Good." Another reach into Hiccup's pocket produced a set of finely made silver bells. "And the finishing touch â€" Valdemaran."

Toothless stuck his tongue out.

"Oh, we both know you enjoy them," Hiccup chided, affixing the strings of bells to each side of the saddle.

Yes, but I'm required as a drake to disdain silver bells and stuff. That's for horses and dragonesses. Toothless tapped the bells with his tail, and grinned. _Officially, anyway._

"Yeah, yeah, you're very dragonly." Hiccup donned a set of his splint armour. "We're doing this old-school, bud."

He checked Inferno was in its holster at his side, and that a supply of cartridges was available. Finally, Hiccup took a roll of tools out of his Pocket and slotted them into their various holding-places around his gear.

"Right. As of now, no more Pocket use. Just like old times."

Dragon and Rider shared a warm look, then Hiccup got on.

"Here goes, Toothless. A whole world to explore, a whole Loop to do it in."

Toothless nodded, walked to the edge of the escarpment, and bunched up.

We go where no one goes, he 'pathed, formally.

"We slow for no one," Hiccup replied, and then both said the last bit together.

"_Get out of our way!_"

With that, Toothless leapt into empty space, and snapped out his wings to steer his dive.

Wherever they were going, it was going to be _fun._

* * *

><p>5.3<p>

I hate loops like this.

Toothless sat, looking morosely out into the bay.

Really, really hate them.

"It's not your fault," Hiccup said, sitting down next to him. "It never is. You'd never do something like that."

I should have been able to resist. Toothless turned his head away from Hiccup. _What kind of dragon am I?_

"Back then... a young one," Hiccup reminded him. "Twenty years old. Just twenty! That's young for humans, let alone Night Furies and _especially_ let alone Loopers."

I was able to fight him off only a few hours later, Toothless insisted. _What does it say about me that I could resist him when you were hovering in front of me, but not resist enough to avoid trying to _kill _you?_I killed him,_Hiccup! Again!_

Hiccup was silent for a moment, and they watched as the boat burned.

"I think it tells me something else," Hiccup said eventually. "What it tells me is-" his voice caught. "Toothless, that was the most painful thing that's ever happened to me. Watching you tearing yourself _apart_ fighting it, and... not able to resist, because it's impossible."

Toothless blew air through his lips. _Yeah, right. Impossible._

"No, seriously." Hiccup reached up and took Toothless' muzzle, and pulled it around to look him in the eye. "Toothless, sometimes â€" very rarely â€" I have loops where I'm the only one Awake. I miss you terribly, but I do what I can. And, once or twice, I've been in that situation and been the Night Fury out of the two of us."

Toothless tried to break free of Hiccup's grip, but the young Viking had gained surprising muscles over the last five years and Toothless wasn't really trying anyway.

"I've _felt_ what you have. As a looper, as someone who knew what was coming, as an empath with training in half a dozen different styles. And it was about the hardest thing I've ever faced."

Hiccup let go. "So believe me, resisting that Bewilderbeest, then and there, for you at barely twenty? Impossible. And â€" you _did it anyway._ You broke free."

The Night Fury grunted. _Not impressed._

After a moment, Hiccup slumped back. "Fine, then. You have your view,

I have mine. Just â€" it's not forever. We can stop this from happening almost every single time. We have stopped this happening almost every single time. It only happened this time because we weren't even Awake yet!"

Toothless scowled, and his spines snapped up. He inhaled, then blew a bolt of blue plasma which erupted into a huge mid-air fireball.

"And," Hiccup went on, as though nothing had happened, "We'll drink his soul to Valhalla. Then, you're putting that harness back on, we're flying after Drago, and we are going to kill him."

At Toothless' mildly surprised glare, Hiccup pointed out at the â€" by now sinking â€" boat. "You think I'm not angry? Toothless, the only reason I'm not spitting nails right now is that I wanted to make sure you were alright. I have had it up to here with negotiation and kid gloves. This time, we deal with Drago the old Viking way."

Toothless considered that, for a long while. Then nodded. Right.

—

Hiccup turned, and began walking over to where Toothless had dumped the harness. On his way, he turned and spoke over his shoulder. "And by the way, I'm uncasing Framherja for this. You go after Drago, I'll handle his dragon."

Suits me. Toothless took one more glance out at the vanishing boat, then followed his Rider.

* * *

><p>5.4<p>

Valka stormed back into the house, scowling.

Stoic was such a... such a Viking sometimes. She loved him, more than anything, but...

Her fists clenched. He'd sit down, and listen carefully, and they'd coo over their son â€" such a wee lad! And everything was right with the world.

And then she got onto the topic she actually wanted to talk about, the important one, and he sort of... locked onto a phrase somewhere in the second sentence and ignored everything else she said after that.

Like this time. She'd tried, again, to tell him that there was something about the dragons he wasn't seeing. Something she'd seen in every one that passed over their village last night, and- and, he was off. Dragons were over the village by night! They must be planning something!

She sighed, her anger draining away. Really, she could see the sense in it â€" the dragons were coming after them, after all, though she knew that the Vikings would do just the same if they knew where to look.

And Stoic had so much work to do, keeping Berk safe " from other tribes as well as from the dragons " and keeping things running. She supposed she should be glad for the time they _did_ have together.

"At least you're not a bloodthirsty old Viking yet, Hiccup," she said, looking down into the crib " then blinked.

"What's this? Did Gobber stop by with another one of his stuffed animals?"

The young smith had been coming by every week or so, with one creation after another. One week, it had been a mobile, which had at least not hurt anyone when it fell out of the window. Another week, there was the bizarre contraption that made a miniature helmet spring up out of a box.

Stoic had nearly hit that one with a hammer by accident.

Fortunately, he'd stuck to stuffed toys since then. There'd been the kraken, the goat, the sheep, and the rabid wolf (with wool foam). This looked like another one.

Seeing her son was asleep, Valka leaned in to pick the toy up. She was honestly curious as to what it would be-

And the surface was warm and rough.

Startled, she pulled her hand back. What she'd thought was a toy _moved_, shifting to open one big, green eye and look up at her, then snuggle back down next to Hiccup. For his part, the boy moved a chubby arm to cuddle the... well, _dragon hatchling _was the only word that applied.

Valka didn't know quite how to take that.

* * *

><p>"There's a dragon in our son's _bed?_" Stoic asked, in disbelief. "Why didn't you-

"What could I have done?" Valka replied. "Besides, I can't see he's in any _danger_. It's tiny. Barely bigger than Hiccup is."

"It's still a dragon!" Stoic retorted. "They're murderous beasts!"

"Oh, aye?" Valka asked.

"Aye!" Stoic deliberately reused her words. "And I'll handle it!"

He deliberately picked up a battleaxe.

"Stoic-" Valka began, then stopped. "Just... be careful where you swing that. And don't do something you'll regret."

"I don't intend to."

* * *

><p>Stoic moved cautiously towards his son's bed, axe in hand.<p>

Something under the blankets squirmed, and then a draconic head popped out. The head was followed by the rest of the body, and some kind of dragon " one Stoic didn't recognize " crawled out, sat down, and looked up at him.

Stoic readied his axe.

The dragon's eyes crossed, and it sneezed, producing a tiny flicker of smoke. It shook its head, then looked back up at him with innocent eyes.

Stoic readied his axe some more.

The dragon yawned.

Stoic's axe had to be ready by now.

The dragon barked sleep out of its eyes, yawned again, and blinked several times.

The covers squirmed again, and Hiccup emerged. "To'less!" he said, beaming, and grabbed at the dragon's tail.

Stoic watched as the tiny dragon and his equally tiny son wrestled for several seconds, then said something obscene, dropped the axe, and stomped back out of the room.

* * *

><p>"It's not too bad, Stoic," Valka reassured him. "I mean, there's that legend about the chief who grew up with a wolf pup..."<p>

* * *

><p>5.5<p>

"That thing has wings," Hiccup said, playing his role. "Okay, let's see if it can use them!"

Toothless grinned, then blasted the Queen again, knocking it sprawling.

Stung, the great dragon growled, then spread wings and hammered the air.

"It can fly," Hiccup noted. Then began to mutter something.

Toothless looked back at him, and flipped an ear. _Don't get any of that on me._

"Do you think my aim's _that_ bad?" Hiccup replied, the spell sizzling on his fingertips. "No, don't answer that. Just get me a good angle."

Toothless nodded, then rolled, so Hiccup was dangling below him "

and above the Death.

A few more seconds, Hiccup mused, judging the altitude of the other dragon. _Now._

"_Wingbind,"_ he said, deliberately casual, and released the spell.

* * *

><p>All the vikings winced at the crunch. "Ooooh..."

* * *

><p>5.6<p>

"Hey," genin Haddock Hiccup asked, raising his hand. "Are we allowed to use summons in the chunin exam?"

Anko looked puzzled. "Of course â€" if you've got them, that is."

"Okay, thanks." Hiccup nodded to himself.

* * *

><p>"Finally," Astrid pronounced, pulling a black roll of paper from the bag of a Rain ninja. "Thanks for holding my axe, babe."<p>

"No-urgh... no problem," Hiccup wheezed, gladly giving his girlfriend her axe back. (It was a custom model in obdurium, which was probably going to wear out sometime _after_ the nearest mountain. It also weighed about thirty kilos.) "Right. Fishlegs?"

Their third team member hopped out of the tree he'd been waiting in, and hit the ground with a _thud_. "No other teams sighted, Hiccup."

"Good. Thanks." He looked around at the others, rubbing his hands. "Now, we need to get to the tower."

"So go ahead and summon Toothless, Meatlug and Stormfly, already," Astrid replied, punching him lightly on the shoulder. "You're the summoner."

"Yeah, about that..." Hiccup grinned. "I was thinking just Toothless, actually."

"Really?" Fishlegs counted on his fingers. "His mobility would be adversely impacted if he had to carry all three of us..."

"Nah, not that. He... learned something new recently." Hiccup took a small vial of prepared blood, daubed a bit on his thumb, and slapped it down on the forest floor. "Hi, Toothless!"

About time, Toothless replied, doing the others the courtesy of broadcasting to them too. _What do you want?_

"A route to the tower, please," Hiccup requested. "It's that

way."

Oh, is that all? Toothless reared up on his hind legs, flapping his wings for stability. _Fire in the hole!_

A blast of multicoloured, pulsing energy erupted from his mouth and blazed a burning, wrecked trail through the Forest of Death.

Fishlegs and Astrid watched as trees fell over, weakened by the initial shockwave. "Not bad," Astrid commented. "What was it?"

Mega Flare! Toothless told her proudly. _I was Bahamut a few loops ago._

Hiccup shrugged. "Well, he _is_ a summon..."

* * *

><p>5.7<p>

"Drago Bloodfist!" Hiccup shouted, as Toothless swept down to hover over the burly warlord. "I hereby say, as dragon rider of Berk, that you suck!"

Toothless nodded agreement, grinning.

"Your army sucks! Your philosophy is an excuse to control people because you fear anyone being able to oppose you â€" so _it_ sucks too! And you're so pathetic, Toothless and I will beat you and your dragon personally, because your dragon also sucks!"

Drago grinned, swept his staff around, and his Bewilderbeest emerged from the sea.

"Furthermore, you're so bad at working with your dragon that, to prove how much you suck, Toothless will be blindfold! And I will have one hand tied behind my back!" Hiccup added, taking out two lengths of cloth. One went around Toothless' eyes, the other around his waist, pinning his left arm. A slightly awkward motion moved Inferno to his right hand, and he lit the fire-sword with a snap-woomph.

Drago's grin congealed slightly. Then he shook his head; a blind dragon was no real threat. "Brave words, dragon-master. But you will _fall_! I alone control the dragons!"

Hiccup and Toothless both raised their eyebrows in unison.

"Hey, Toothless?" Hiccup asked, loud enough for Drago to hear. "Blow his eyebrows off, would you?"

Toothless opened his mouth, and built a plasma bolt up. Hiccup tapped his forehead a few times, steering his mouth, then whispered something into his ear.

The bolt exploded on Drago's dragon-skin cloak, brought up whip-fast to block the dragonfire.

No real damage was done, but that wasn't really the point of the

exercise. The point was that Hiccup had demonstrated that " even firing blind " Toothless could put a bolt on target. And that _had_ to rattle him.

That done, the Berk dragon/rider pair swept up into the sky, to stoop on Drago's dragon.

* * *

><p>"Okay," Hiccup said, speaking normally once they were away from Drago. "Remember, we're trying to scare the Bewilderbeest off, not kill it."<p>

I know, I know. Toothless rolled his eyes. _He sucks, remember? Like you said in the speech?_

"Just checking." Hiccup looked around, gauging their height. "Okay, we're about two thousand feet up. Ten degrees right... hold it... and dive on my mark, steep as you like. When I tap your neck, fire straight forwards and then pull out. Now!"

Toothless swept his wings back, and they plummeted out of the sky, ready to give Drago's Bewilderbeest a permanent dental treatment.

* * *

><p>"Is he actually..." Stoic stopped, lost for words. "He is, isn't he."<p>

"Diving with Toothless blindfold and one hand behind his back?" Gobber nodded. "Yep, looks like. Guess this is what you mean by chiefly material, eh, Stoic?"

"Well..." Stoic groped for the words, as a blue globe of fire bloomed twice on the enemy dragon's left tusk. "At least he'll have Astrid to keep him grounded?"

"Aye," Gobber agreed sagely. "The girl what throws axes at flies, and hits 'em, is the shy, gentle, retirin' one of the two. Sure you want him as Chief?"

* * *

><p>5.8<p>

Stoic the Vast had realized what was about to happen before his son had.

Seeing Toothless fighting, his face contorting as he tried not to do what he had been ordered to do, and seeing how his eyes opened out from those dangerously thin slits whenever Hiccup spoke, he'd allowed himself to hope. But, ultimately, Toothless had lost the battle.

And that had left Stoic with two options.

The first was the one he'd trained for over twenty years to do. Fight a dragon. Attack Toothless, and maybe " _maybe_ " he could neutralize Toothless before someone died.

But that would be almost impossible. And the one who died would

likely be Toothless.

So that meant that there was only one _choice_, out of the two options.

And Stoic took it. Without hesitation. He ran forwards, and pushed Hiccup out of the way just as Toothless finally fired.

He had time for two thoughts, almost opposite to one another, to run through his head. The first was ironic. _I should have known a dragon would get me one day._

At least it was a Night Fury, which was a fairly rare event.

The other thought, however, brought nothing but peace.

Look at the son we made, Valka!

* * *

><p>There was no pain. Toothless' plasma bolts killed by shock, not fire, at least on a direct hit.<p>

So, after the bolt hit, there was a timeless moment of nothingness-

And then, Stoic's eyes snapped open.

It was dark, and the air was cold. Fire shot overhead, light glinted on swords and axes, and a dragon swooped low over the village, spitting fire.

Stoic looked down at his own axe, resting comfortably in his grip, and a terrible dread coursed through him.

He was in Helheim. Condemned to fight dragons, in a mocking parody of Valhalla.

* * *

><p>The first question Stoic had was " what do I do?

He'd started by trying to see where he was, wondering if it was possible for him to just _not_ fight. To hurt none of the dragons, and see if " maybe " he could do to these dragons what Hiccup had taught them.

Is that it? Is this because I did not listen to my wife?

But it only took a few seconds to realize " this was Berk. Berk as it was, five years ago.

It couldn't be simply that this was where everyone from Berk went. Already he'd seen Spitelout, and Gobber, and the other " teens " of Hiccup's age, running around putting out fires. They couldn't _all_ be dead, could they?

No, Spitelout hadn't been at the battle. He at least would still be alive.

So " what now? If he was... in the past, through some trick of Loki, or just in some recreation engineered by Hel, then... should he fight?

Another moment of thought, and he had what to do.

Don't stand aside. He was a Viking warrior, not some honourless Byzantine. He'd do the right thing.

Do it better this time. Protect the village, don't hurt the dragons if he could help it, and... do what he could to help.

He readied his hammer.

* * *

><p>Getting back into the swing (and hammerblow) of things was surprisingly easy.<p>

It helped that, in the years since Hiccup had begun teaching them about dragons, there'd still been the occasional altercation that he'd had to break up. (With violence.) And that meant he still knew how to swing a maul.

Picking targets was even a little easier. He now knew the place to whack a Nightmare to daze it, make it feel like this was all too much bloody work, and drive it off without too much fuss.

The whole night had an air of... unreality about it, though. Not only was it exactly like the past, things were happening exactly like the past.

A blue explosion lit the sky, and Stoic's head snapped up.
Toothless.

That was a problem he hadn't wanted to confront.

Should he try to stop it happening? Make sure Hiccup didn't shoot down the Night Fury and cripple him?

And if he did... then what?

Without Toothless being shot down, without that moment of realization " on both sides " would it even be possible to have peace?

Stoic spotted Hiccup, running out of the smithy with his newly-designed folding ballista. If he was going to change this, he had to act soon.

"|

And he couldn't.

If it was a matter of Toothless and Hiccup, he would have. But this was about everyone " villagers and dragons alike.

And a chief had to do what was best for everyone.

So he said nothing, and watched as Hiccup unfolded the ballista and fired.

Now that he was ready for it, he could see the almost-invisible whiplash of the bolas flying out, crossing the moving shimmer in the night that was Toothless, and then a faint cry of pain.

"Oh, yes!" Hiccup shouted, so proud that it tore at Stoic's heart. Especially with what had happened, just before-

Before he died.

"Did anyone see that?"

Hiccup turned, only to be face-to-face with a Monstrous Nightmare.

Stoic was already running, and heard Hiccup's resigned "...except you." Even now, the sheer sarcasm in the tone made him want to chuckle.

Then Stoic jumped, and landed on the Nightmare's back just as Hiccup turned to run. There was a whoomph of flame, which Stoic promptly handled by hitting the Nightmare a sharp rap with his maul, and he stepped off as it slumped.

"Nice work, Hiccup!" he said, cheerfully. "Good... distraction."

Seeing the blank astonishment on Hiccup's face, he nearly wept. Had he treated the boy this poorly, that a simple compliment was cause of so much surprise?

"I saw what you did there," Stoic added, and Hiccup if anything went paler. "Once this is all sorted out â€" and this brute," he added, rapping the Nightmare on the nose, "is locked up, we should see if you hit anything."

Now Hiccup was going faintly green. "Uh... sure, Dad," he managed.

"Good!"

* * *

><p>The sun was rising by the time the two Haddockes left the house.<p>

Stoic had seen to it that the Nightmare was put in the cells associated with Dragon Training â€" the old version â€" but not seriously harmed.

He had plans for that beastie.

Plans which, as it happened, he had nearly four hours to think through in great detail. The place Toothless had crashed was something like the other side of the mountain, and it was nigh on ten in the morning by the time they finally got close enough to hear Toothless' cries.

Hiccup glanced back at him. "Dad, should I-"

"Son-" Stoic paused, trying to think of what to say. How to prod Hiccup towards the right choice, without making that at all clear. "Son, you know what I do to dragons."

"Yeah, Dad, I'm pretty familiar with what you do to dragons," Hiccup confirmed.

"But â€" well, what you do to dragons should be what you want to do to dragons. I-"

Stoic groped for the words.

"Just doing this, you've impressed me, son. What you do next... do what you think you should."

"Yeah, no pressure or anything..." Hiccup rolled his eyes.

"I mean it, Hiccup. I'll wait back behind you. I won't look."

Hiccup blinked, frowned for a moment, then turned to go on. "Okay, if you say so..."

* * *

><p>The tail fin was still intact.<p>

That was the first thing Stoic noticed, when they topped the ridge to see the Night Fury â€" Toothless â€" in his crash scar.

The second thing, and one which puzzled Stoic as much as the intact tail, was that the cords were... not exactly tightly wrapped. They were snarled up easily enough to prevent the dragon from flying, and one loop went around his muzzle, but... there was something off about them.

And the third thing which didn't seem quite right was that the crash scar was burned.

After a moment's thought, though, Stoic realized what must have happened. Toothless had been struggling to get out as he came down, hadn't quite made it, used his fire to blast away any trees which might have hit him â€" saving his fin â€" and then the impact itself had tied his muzzle.

"Go on," Stoic said, walking back. "Remember what I said."

"Sure, Dad..." Hiccup muttered.

Stoic sat behind a tree, waiting.

Several seconds of silence, with only the sound of Hiccup quietly talking. He couldn't make out the words.

A croon by Toothless.

A few more seconds of speech, then the sound of a knife working.

And, finally, a loud roar.

Stoic felt quite pleased with himself, actually. That was pretty much how it had gone when they first met, from what Hiccup had said.

But, to keep up appearances, he hurried over the top of the ridge just as Toothless ran off. Favouring one wing over the other â€" though it was probably just bruised, since there'd been nothing missing.

"Are you alright, Hiccup?" he asked, dropping his hammer and lifting Hiccup up off the forest floor.

"Yeah, thanks," Hiccup said absently. "Dad, I-"

Stoic shook his head. "Too much of your mother in you," he said, the words bringing a smile to his lips.

How could he have forgotten, all these years? There was so much of Valka in Hiccup, so why had he expected him to be his father's son alone?

* * *

><p>As they walked back, Stoic thought about three things.<p>

The first was â€" had that been enough? Without the tail fin, would simply releasing Toothless be enough for Hiccup to form a bond with him?

He hoped it was, or he'd screwed everything up already.

The second was a conclusion that he'd come to almost without noticing. This is not Helheim.

Stoic couldn't say exactly what had led him to think that, but he was sure of it.

And that led to the third conclusion. A great, singing conclusion, which ran through his soul like fire.

My wife is alive.

* * *

><p>"Okay, beastie," Stoic said quietly, opening the gate. "We can do this the easy way, or the hard way."<p>

With a growl, the Monstrous Nightmare stood in its chains.

"So, let's try the easy way first, okay?" He threw his hammer to the side of the arena, producing a clang, then unlocked the chains one after another.

When only the last one remained, he walked around to the front. "The hard way's still an option, you know. So, here's how this is going to work. I need a ride, and you're going to give it to me."

The Nightmare glared at him, trying to open its jaw.

"But," he added, in a lighter tone. "We can do all this quite easily. I punched you out once before, and I can do it again... but I'm not

going to."

Walking back over to the gate, he hefted a basket of fish, and dumped it out in front of the Nightmare. "Enjoy."

The last chain came off.

The Nightmare looked at him with anger roiling in its eyes, then looked down at the fish, back up at him, shrugged, and started eating.

While it was occupied, Stoic walked up slowly and carefully. He scratched it under its chin, and got out a fishskin-wrapped smorgasbord he'd prepared earlier.

"You know," he said, munching slowly, "if there ever was a dragon that's just so Viking it's ridiculous, it's a Monstrous Nightmare. I mean, you've got all the horns."

The dragon "not Hookfang, Stoic thought; he'd have to come up with a name" shot him a glance, then continued eating.

"So, about this whole... queen... thing," Stoic added. "I don't begin to understand it myself, but... can't say I blame you, not knowing that."

The important thing, Hiccup had said, was the tone of voice. Dragons didn't always understand exactly what people meant by what they said, but they could tell a lot by how people said it.

The dragon "Firewyrn" sounded like a good name, to Stoic "finished the fish. It sniffed around for a bit, trying to see if it had missed any, then locked eyes on the smorgasbord.

"Oh, you want some of this, do you?" Stoic asked, moving the food around. It followed, bobbing its head to keep looking.

"Ah, fine." Stoic broke the bread in half, and tossed one half into the air. Firewyrn snapped it out of the air, swallowed, and crooned at Stoic.

"Right, then." Stoic glanced out of the gates at the sky; still dark.

He'd told Gobber that he was going to be out looking for signs of Timberjacks "as a kind of working holiday" so he had most of the night and the next day.

Here goes.

"Now, here's the deal, beastie." Stoic rubbed Firewyrn under the eye ridge. "I've got a little trip to take. You take me, and we'll both be happy. Deal?"

The Nightmare didn't reply, as such, but did purr and lean into Stoic's scratches. Good enough.

* * *

><p>It took about five minutes to get airborne. Firewyrn was

surprisingly quiet in flight, at least when not on fire, and the exit from Berk was as easy as you please.<p>

The actual _flying_, on the other hand, was considerably harder.

"No, no, left!" Stoic gripped Firewyrms neck with his feet, pulling on one horn and pushing the other. "_Left_, foolish beastie!"

Firewyrms grumbled something, and trimmed his wings into the turn.

"Yes, I know, I'm a heavy old Viking," Stoic muttered. "Do you _have_ to rub it in?"

They passed between Old Crone Spire and Barleycorn Stack with about two inches of clearance either side.

"It opened out more further down!" Stoic slapped Firewyrms side, and he grumbled something which would probably be unrepeatable in Norse.

"Okay, we're through the stacks. Now, up â€" gently! â€" and... little to the right, little to the right..."

Stoic kept one eye on the sky, adjusting the course of his new dragon by the North Star and Thiassis Eyes. _Now, what time of year is it..._

Like any Viking, he could steer by the sun and the stars. But it was a bit harder when you went about five years back in time and didn't know where the sun was supposed to be.

A Thunderdrum boomed below, breaking the surface, and Firewyrms looked down with interest.

Stoic just wished he had a saddle. _Bareback_ dragon riding wasn't exactly comfortable at the best of times...

* * *

><p>"Okay, what's up with Dad?" Hiccup asked, lying back against Toothless' back.<p>

Beats me. Toothless shrugged his wings, basking in the sunlight. _Maybe it's a variant?_

"Heck of a variant."

For another minute or so, they just sat there.

"How hard was it to find the bolas?"

_Hard. It was about half a mile down. I'm _so_ glad I can hold my breath really well._ A pause. _And I've got one of those nifty Jedi things which you put on your nose._

"I did wonder."

The really hard thing was tying myself up.

Hiccup chuckled. "Would you rather I actually aimed for you?"

Let's not be hasty, here. How often will your father notice the shot?

"I don't know, Toothless." Hiccup kicked at the grass. "Maybe he'll notice every time I deliberately miss?"

_Now _that_ would be ironic._ Toothless yawned. _I fancy some lunch._

"We only had breakfast an hour ago!"

* * *

><p>Firewyrn flared his wings, touched down, stumbled once or twice as he shed speed, and lowered himself to the ground.<p>

"Not bad," Stoic informed him, giving the Nightmare a scratch. "We'll see how you handle having a saddle, of course, but â€" aye, good work."

He'd seen a few dragons on the way in. They'd mostly flown off towards the big ice lair, but one or two had flown up closer until Firewyrn snarled at them.

So... he now had to confront the question that had been waiting for him.

What did he say?

When he'd met her again last â€" and was it only two days ago, or five years in the future? â€" he'd had no idea what he was about to run into.

So he'd guessed. And that had worked.

But... would it be right to approach it the same way again?

I love her. And â€" she still loves me.

That made it all clear, didn't it?

Stoic shook his head, and came to a decision.

He'd just be himself, and trust in that.

"Come on, Firewyrn. Let's go see Valka."

The Nightmare made an interested noise, and followed him into the passage.

* * *

><p>He'd only been here once before, and the passages were complicated and confusing. Probably by design, actually, since that would make it harder for an attacker.<p>

After a few minutes of trying to make himself understood, he managed to convince Firewyrn to light his head on fire â€" making a useful torch, in the morning light filtered through several feet of ice â€" and he was making good progress. He hoped.

"Not one more step."

The voice was muffled by a mask, but â€" oh, so familiar. The voice he'd hoped to hear for nearly two decades, and the voice he'd heard again so recently.

"Valka?" he said, looking up. "Is it..."

The figure â€" standing on a ledge, overlooking him â€" was... not quite the same as when he'd seen her last. The armour was a little different, the blue paint fresher, and the staff didn't quite look the same.

But â€" it was unmistakeably the same Valka.

She crouched, looking down at him through the eyes of her mask.

"I don't believe it..." she said, quietly. "Stoic?"

"Yes," he replied.

"With a dragon?" Valka came down to his level in a supple series of movements, and a draconic head â€" Cloudjumper, Stoic thought â€" stuck his head through where she had been. "You are here with a dragon?" Another thought occurred to her. "How did you find me?"

"I've been looking for years, Valka," Stoic said, sighing. "But it was only today that I realized how I had to look. You... you've been right, all these years."

"I haven't," Valka replied, removing her mask and looking down. "If... I should have come back."

"That doesn't matter. Not any more." Stoic reached for her, and she stepped back. He let his hand thump back to his side. "I'm sorry."

"For what?" Valka asked.

"For... Hel, everything. For not listening to you back then. For how I've treated dragons since. And... for whatever I'm doing now that's wrong."

Firewyrn made a concerned noise. He moved up to Stoic's side, and pushed his snout into Stoic's hand.

"Please, Valka. I... I still love you. And..." He shook his head, blinking at his damp eyes. "If you want to stay here... I won't mind. At all."

"That's not-" Valka broke off mid-sentence. "I don't know what to..."

A noise from up the tunnel interrupted them.

* * *

><p>"Okay, Toothless, something is seriously off," Hiccup said, shaking his head. "Dad's not in the village, a Monstrous Nightmare escaped, and Gobber only said he was going out for a boundary walk â€" whatever _that's_ supposed to mean."

I don't know either, Toothless 'pathed, concerned. _Something's up._

"You think I don't know that?" Hiccup winced. "Sorry, bud. I'm a bit tense right now. Nothing's going like it should. I mean, we were going to see if we could get that Alpha mom knows to win the fight with Drago's one, but..."

But things aren't going the way they should, Toothless acknowledged. _And you're worried for your father._

"I am, yeah." Hiccup frowned. "Actually, I think we should go find him."

Where should we look?

"_That_ part's easy." Hiccup took a wand out of his Pocket, then a complete dragon harness sized for Toothless. "Here, put this on."

Toothless began to shuck into the harness. It was one they'd made some time ago, so that he could put it on alone â€" mainly for prank purposes, actually. _And while I'm doing that?_

Hiccup held his palm up, the wand balancing on it. "Point me â€" Dad."

The wand spun, and stopped.

"Three-four-seven degrees. Okay, not what I was expecting... right, bud, next up â€" take us to Dragon Bank." As he spoke, Hiccup swung up into the saddle and clipped himself in. "Fast as you like."

That's three hundred miles â€" oh. Toothless spread his wings and took off, clawing for height. _I see what you mean. Stand by for _Between_ jump!_

Everything went cold and dark. The cold of absolute zero, tempered only by the lack of anywhere for body heat to go. The dark of absolute nothing. The place where nothing existed â€" except, occasionally, certain dragons.

Together, the duo reassured one another, feeling for the only contact there was in that nothingness.

And then, eight very long seconds later, they exploded back into the sun and light of the sidereal world.

"Level flight, Toothless," Hiccup reminded him, and held up his palm. "Point me â€" Dad."

The wand spun.

"Right, that's our second bearing. Now, just connect the lines, and... okay, that _can't_ be right."

Toothless tried to look at the map. This made straight and level flight neither straight nor level. _What is it?_

"Head to Mom's sanctuary!"

What, really? Toothless blinked. _That _can't_ be right._

"That's what I said!" Hiccup shrugged. "But it's the only lead we've got."

True. Three, two, one-

* * *

><p>"Dad!" Hiccup called, running surely through the now-familiar tunnels."Are you okay-"<p>

He nearly ran into the back of a Monstrous Nightmare. "Whoa! Wait â€" Mom?"

"Stoic?" Valka asked, looking at her husband.

"Hiccup!" Stoic said, for his part completely lost.

Toothless loped up behind. _Toothless!_ he announced helpfully to Hiccup.

"How did you ride Toothless to get here?" Stoic asked, trying to understand what was going on.

"How did _you_ even find here? Did you ride on that Monstrous Night-wait." Hiccup looked at Stoic in astonishment. "How do _you_ know his name?"

Hiccup, Toothless 'pathed. _That's the Nightmare who nearly incinerates you at the start of every loop._

Yeah, I know, I recognize him, Hiccup replied silently. _But how come-_ oh. _Oh, wow._

"Dad," he begun, cautiously. "What would your reaction be, if I said to you... time travel."

Stoic's jaw dropped. "You too?"

"What's going on?" Valka asked plaintively. Both Cloudjumper and the newly named Firewyrms rumbled something a lot like agreement.

* * *

><p>"So, you're telling me..." Stoic fumbled for the words, sipping at a mug of hot milk in Valka's cave. "This... isn't the first time?"<p>

"For me, no. Not even the thousandth. I'm kind of an old hand at

it."

Toothless trotted over to Hiccup and laid his head on Hiccup's shoulder, earning a scratch. "Same for Toothless. We've been through a lot together. In fact, we've been through almost everything together."

"So... why you then, and me now?"

"Search me." Hiccup shrugged, looking embarrassed. "We still don't really understand it all. It could be luck, it could be how close someone is to me, it could be... all sorts of things. But the one most likely to be able to explain it is our Admin â€" the patron god of our time loop, basically. See, we're not the only world this is happening to..."

"Patron gods..." Stoic shook his head. "I'm only beginning to understand what's going on here. Okay... _who_ is your â€" our, I suppose â€" patron god?"

"Yeah, you're gonna like this..." Hiccup sighed. "Loki."

Stoic blinked. "Somehow, I'm not as surprised as I should be."

"Great work with Firewyrn, by the way, Dad," Hiccup added, gesturing to the Nightmare.

"Oh, er, thanks." Stoic rubbed the back of his neck, suddenly nervous. "Now... how do we explain this to your mother?"

"Good question."

* * *

><p>5.9 (MLP cross)<p>

"And here she is," the Mayor announced. "Princess Celestia!"

What stepped out onto the stage was not, however, Princess Celestia.

Perhaps more surprisingly, nor was it Princess Luna. It wasn't even her dark self, or the looping version of said dark self.

The ponies of Ponyville panicked, running for the exits, as a huge red-black dragon crawled up onto the stage and roared. Its spines shook, and it flashed into flame.

"What's-" Twilight began, surprised, then sighed and facehoofed. "Of course. Nightmare."

Fluttershy was already trotting determinedly up the steps. "Hello, big guy."

The dragon snarled once more, then looked down at her.

"It's okay," Fluttershy said, her face and manner serene. "No-pony here's going to hurt you."

After a moment, the Monstrous Nightmare relaxed. Its eyes widened out from fight-or-flight slits into calmer circles, and it allowed her to gently touch it.

Where am I? it asked. _The last I remember, Snotlout was putting me to bed. But I can't feel him. Is this a new Loop?_

Twilight trotted over. "Are you... I think it was... Hookfang?"

Yes. Hello.

Twilight shook her head helplessly. This was going to be interesting...

I saw another pony like you, but one with wings, he added. _She sent me down here to attack._

"Did she look like this?" Twilight asked, producing an image of Nightmare Moon.

Almost, but her hair was a bit lighter and her eyes weren't slit shaped.

"Huh." Twilight absorbed that, wondering what it meant. "Okay, I think the best thing is for you to go with Fluttershy. She's good at taking care of animals, and you sort of count."

Thank you. Hookfang followed Fluttershy off the stage, stepping carefully around the chairs strewn across the floor.

Poor guy, Twilight thought, with a sigh. Dragons who had the Pernese bond ability, from what she knew, found it very disorienting not to have their Riders present unless they were used to it.

* * *

><p>"Are you sure this is a dragon?" Snotlout asked, looking at what was " apparently " his mount for the loop.

"Look," the winged unicorn horse retorted, in a high pitched voice. "I don't get it either, okay? Just be glad I'm letting you ride me in the first place, I'm not comfortable with people on my back..."

"Ergh, this is gonna look ridiculous." Snotlout bowed to the inevitable, and started checking his not-a-dragon's harness. "At least tell me your name."

"Nyx." The horse frowned down at his handiwork. "Are you sure that's the right kind of buckle?"

"Yeah, yeah, I've been doing this for yonks," Snotlout replied. "Loki's teeth, I should have known something was up when I had a Lunar Nightmare instead of a Monstrous one..."

* * *

><p>5.10 (Bardic Knowledge)<p>

Hiccup looked at the line-up of dragons. "Okay, so it looks like we've got a different set of dragons this time around. Everyone?"

"I'm a Shadow Dragon," said Toothless. "And might I add that, though it is refreshing, actually talking feels kinda weird."

Hookfang rumbled in acknowledgement, a few embers dripping off in the process. "Pyroclastic Dragon."

Stormfly grinned, "Battle Dragon."

Meatlug glanced up from the sword she was chewing on. "Rust Dragon."

"You think it's odd to talk?" said Barf.

"We're so not used to being in separate bodies." added Belch.

"We're Chaos Dragons." they finished together.

"And the Greenish-Red Death seems to have been replaced by a five-headed dragon of some kind," said Hookfang.

"Sounds like Tiamat to me," said Fishlegs, looking through one of a stack of books he had just pulled from his Pocket. Curious, Hiccup grabbed the top one.

"Dungeons & Dragons, Draconomicon," he read, then sighed at the subtitle. "The Book of Dragons."

"So who wants to bet that the good alpha Bewilder Beast is Bahamut or something?" asked Gobber, glancing through another book Fishlegs had pulled out.

Stoick glanced over the group of teens and dragons, and shook his head. "It feels strange knowing about Zipplebacks and Nadders, but then to have information on these new ones like I've been fighting them all my life instead. Apparently, Black Dragons spit acid like a Changewing and Green Dragons breath some sort of choking gas-"

"Chlorine, according to this," Hiccup said, now browsing the Monster Manual. "And don't worry, dad, you'll get used to it. Variants can be a bit off-putting at times."

* * *

><p>5.11<p>

"Choosing a dragon takes a while, Dad," Hiccup said. Again.

"I know, Hiccup," Stoic replied. "But €" what you said, about Hookfang and Stormfly and the others... and Toothless, of course-"

I feel-ergh-glad he remembers me, Toothless managed, wings beating double-time to stay aloft. Why is your father so damn heavy?

It's in his name, Hiccup pointed out.

Stoic didn't notice the byplay. "-so it's an even more important choice. The dragon who becomes my partner, who I'll know â€" well, pretty much forever, if I understand what you're saying."

"That's about the shape of it, yeah," Hiccup agreed. "The dragon you know best is the one who Awakens alongside you, eventually. Which is why you need to take your time. I mean, there's already Skullcrusher, and Firewyrn, and Thornado... any one of them seems friendly enough."

Toothless strained, muscles bunching and pulling his wings on the downbeat. _Heaviest. Viking. Ever._

They broke through the cloud layer, and soared over Berk.

"None of them is quite the _right_ dragon," Stoic opined. "Or, I don't know which one _is_ the right dragon. I'd like to have a look around, see what other options there are."

"Well, you're the boss... luckily." Hiccup reached back and clapped his father on the shoulder. "Seriously, Dad, it _sucks_ when I have to be in charge. I'm glad you're back â€" for good, this time."

"Thanks, Hiccup," Stoic said, a little awkwardly. "Now, er, about the dragon thing-"

"Oh, right. Well, there's this planet, called Pern â€" it's another one of those loops, like we are â€" and they have telepathic dragons. They can do all sorts of cool stuff, and it's where we got that bond I've been mentioning. Basically, so long as you've made your choice before your first Pern loop, you should be fine."

"Which means I might not have enough time to make my choice," Stoic replied. "Anyway, we can talk about that later. What are we doing now?"

"The grand tour," Hiccup replied, grinning. "Well, with the occasional stop to let Toothless rest, of course. We're going to see every kind of dragon I've ever found around Berk. First stop â€" the Scauldron!"

He glanced back again. "By the way, yes, this _is_ kind of scary the first time."

"What's-" Stoic began, then everything went black.

* * *

><p>"How long has he been able to do that?" Stoic asked, as he clutched the harness.

A while, Toothless answered, speaking directly to Stoic's mind this time. _You should see the Blue Thing, I learned that not long after-_ he stopped. _After, you know. That._

The trio flew on in silence for a bit.

Sorry, Toothless added.

"No need to apologize," Stoic told him. "Drago got to all of us. You did all you could. Brought me time."

Nothing more was said until they landed, all three lost in their own thoughts.

* * *

><p>"Okay, so, this is a Scauldron," Hiccup shouted. "Good points â€" unexpected attack! Not often you find a dragon which can put out fires! And it's big, too."<p>

"Downsides?" Stoic asked, as a blaze of dragonfire from Toothless intercepted a bolt of steaming water.

"Bad attitude, smell, and appetite," Hiccup summarized. "Also, to train it you have to cover yourself in fish oil."

"Yeah, I think this one's a pass."

"Fair enough. Toothless!"

Toothless whined. _Not again! At least go on a diet, Stoic!_

* * *

><p>5.12 (Bardic Knowledge)<p>

It was always rather annoying to Awaken immediately after having shot down Toothless, for both of them, but Hiccup had very little time to dwell on it.

"Did anybody see that?" his mouth finished saying. As his turn around completed, he was confronted, as usual, but- "You're not a Monstrous Nightmare." Oh, it was big and red, like a Nightmare, but the head was far wider, and the saliva dripping from the creature's mouth was apparently acidic, judging from the sizzling of the ground with each droplet. So, considering his current position, Hiccup did the only he thing he could:

Run screaming.

As he looked back towards the not-Nightmare, he saw a few more differences. It wasn't shaped like a typical dragon, with proper arms instead of four legs, and, actually, no legs in sight. It was just slithering along after him at a remarkable pace. It was some time in practicing, but Hiccup had learned how to parse his in-Loop memories whilst running, only to find everything baseline _except for the monster chasing him_. No, wait, there was one more thing: A new kid that had "always" lived in Berk.

"Wait!" That was him now, actually. According to the memories, this guest Looper, named Tacky in Berk fashion, had been his best friend, being just as un-viking as his baseline self. They were even known as the Disastrous Duo. Hiccup was only mildly surprised to find "Tacky" run past him towards the other new thing, which stopped short and seemed to be struggling to not attack.

"Ta... Kato... Mon?" growled the beast. Moments later, Toothless,

tail fin regenerated with some neat tricks he'd picked up, landed beside him.

Hey.

"Hey yourself. Any ideas?" Before Toothless could reply, "Tacky" answered instead.

"Sorry about that. When Guilmon Wakes up as Megidramon it can be hard for him to control himself. I'm Matsuki Takato, by the way, a Digimon Tamer."

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. This is Toothless."

Charmed.

"Haven't seen you at any MUDRAAL meetings, but you seem familiar, some how."

"I'm sorry, Mudraal?"

"Multiversal Union of Dragons, Riders And Associated Loopers. I couldn't get it to spell 'Dragon'."

"Can.. I..." started Guilmon/Megidramon. He paused, coughed heavily, then spat a hissing ball of... something... out to sea. Only to continue in a surprisingly childish voice. "Can I have some bread Takatomon? You know how hungry I can get like this."

"Yeah, yeah. You're just lucky my parents are still here as bakers. Though it is really bizarre to see dad with all those muscles."

Hiccup suppressed a snicker. Looks like this Berk didn't have a shortage in bread-making vikings.

* * *

><p>AN:<p>

5.1: The Black Widow (YF-23) is a pretty good Toothless-esque plane. But Hiccup's been somewhere it was accepted, so he just calls it the F-23.

>5.2: Anyone recognize the concept? I'll only say that it's from a book by the Dragon Lady herself, Anne McCaffrey.
5.3: Not a pleasant memory.

>5.4: Well, they are the same age.
5.5: A spell that disables flight.

>5.6: Not all that dissimilar to the Blue Thing.
5.7: Dramatic. Flair.

>5.8: A well-deserved Awakening.
5.9: They're both Nightmares. That's about the end of the similarity.

>5.10: Ah, 3.x.
5.11: There's a lot of choice.

>5.12: If they've met, it was so long ago neither remembers it. Otherwise, it could just be another Japanese anime protagonist of that type.<p>

Comments appreciated.

6. Chapter 6

Caution: these contain spoilers for the second film.

* * *

><p>6.1 (5.11 continued)<p>

* * *

><p>"So," Hiccup said brightly. "We've pretty much done all of them."<p>

Stoic silently licked his fingers, then pinched out a smouldering ember on his beard.

In the corner, Toothless wheezed something incoherent. _About time._

"So, any thoughts?" Hiccup added, taking out a notebook. "Boneknapper? Changewing? Perhaps a Stormcutter like Cloudjumper?"

He shrugged. "There's a lot of choice, so... can we narrow it down a bit?"

Stoic stood up, picked the notebook out of his son's hands, and dropped it on the floor.

"Hiccup," he said, hands on hips. "In the course of the last few hours, we have been buried alive, frozen, nearly choked on clouds of black smoke, half-drowned, I've had my armour sandblasted, there were at least four separate times we were set on fire, and I'm pretty sure I nearly lost my head. Twice." He shook his head. "And that's only scratching the _surface._"

Hiccup blinked. "So?"

I think he's trying to tell you to give him a minute, Toothless opined.

"Oh! Oh, right, sorry." Hiccup shrugged helplessly. "I'm just... too used to dragons, I guess. This is pretty normal for meeting wild dragons."

"And as for when you tried to sell me on the _queen_..." Stoic winced. "I actually feel sorry for it."

Told you the blue thing was awesome. Toothless flipped his tail. _But yeah, the queen's kind of moody at the best of times. Plus I don't think she'd fit into Berk._

"Guess it's an occupational hazard," Hiccup said, sitting down next to Toothless and giving him a rub on the back of the neck. After a minute, he nodded at the notebook. "So... any thoughts?"

"Yes." Stoic reluctantly picked it up, then went through to a long list of dragons, and began methodically crossing most of them out. "I'm too big for that one, _way_ too big for those, nope, nope, nope,

too smelly, I can't breathe underwater, my armour's made of metal, I prefer my insides _inside_, can't fly, can't swim too well, can't breathe firedamp either, we couldn't find one..."

"Er..." Hiccup raised a hand. "Are you leaving _any_ of them open?"

The book thudded back down next to Hiccup. "There's the shortlist," Stoic informed him. "We'll give what's left a try."

Hiccup opened the book. "Let's see... Rumblehorn, Monstrous Nightmare, Thunderdrum, Raincutter, Timberjack, and a questionmark for Skrill... well, you've already tried the first three. Tell you what, Dad," Hiccup said, looking up. "If I ever work out how to tame a Skrill, I'll let you know. Until then... Timberjack or Raincutter tomorrow?"

"Let's go with Raincutter," Stoic decided. "Now, we should get back."

Toothless growled, reluctantly standing up. _Seriously. Get someone else to carry him tomorrow. Aren't Snotlout and Hookfang awake this time?_"_

"Think so..." Hiccup hedged. "Can't you check?"

Yep, just did. Toothless actually did a dance. _Free of this crushing weight! O, only a few more minutes, and I am free at last!_"_

Stoic looked hurt. "I'm not _that_ heavy, am I?"

Yes, you are. In fact, you're heavier.

* * *

><p>6.2<p>

* * *

><p>"Well, bud," Hiccup began. "Guess it's time for a little experimenting."<p>

Given the situation, this feels a bit like trying to work out if a bomb is live by kicking it. Toothless waggled his wings. _But I'm game._

"I'm glad for the vote of confidence," Hiccup told him.

A nuclear bomb.

"Those are actually safer to kick than â€" right a bit â€" than normal ones."

Toothless trimmed his angle of attack, shedding as little speed as possible as he turned onto the new heading. _Really? Huh. Another thing television has lied to me about._

Hiccup smiled wryly. "Only _you_ could end up a TV addict despite having been born in the iron age. Okay-"

Are you sure it's the iron age, actually? Toothless interrupted. _I swear the Romans have already happened._

"Yeah, but we still use iron and so on," Hiccup countered. "Without my influence â€" and yes, this time it _is_ 'my' influence, not yours-"

Toothless blew a raspberry.

"-then we wouldn't have as much steel as we do. Technically, we're approaching the early medieval period, and we might have passed into it, but-" Hiccup shrugged. "Technology wise, we're iron age."

He shook his head. "Anyway. There's the storm cloud â€" now, let's get some height. High as you can." As he spoke, Hiccup rummaged in his pocket for a pair of ioun stones. "Two iridescent spindles â€" here's yours, and, here's mine. Air supply is on."

Right. Here comes the stratosphere. Toothless tilted back a little, fins flickering from position to position, and began a steady series of wingbeats that would climb him to fifty thousand feet.

I hope you remembered the electricity resist rings, too. Even if we don't find one, being struck by lightning mid-thunderstorm isn't my idea of fun...

* * *

><p>"Got one," Hiccup said suddenly, breath steaming in the thin, cold air. "Bearing 063, altitude -65."<p>

I see it. Toothless' head tracked down, and his eyes furrowed. _Ready?_

"Just give me a sec." Hiccup dug in his Pocket again. "Ring of electrical resistance for me... give me your foreleg-" He slid a second ring onto Toothless' toe, where it contracted slightly and locked in place. "-ring of electrical resist for _you_, and..."

A burst of golden light.

"-Framherja. Okay, go for it."

Toothless folded in one wing, flipped over, and went into a dive. After one complete roll, he stabilized, shedding height for speed. _Let me know if I'm approaching compression lock._

Can't you feel that yourself?

Yeah, but I'm unobservant sometimes. Target fixation. Toothless flipped an ear. _Here we go!_

* * *

><p>I am so glad that we practised this obsessively, Hiccup commented, using their mind-link now because of the sheer wind rush. _Okay, assuming I don't go flying clear out of the saddle when I sit up, we should be good to go._

Toothless trimmed his tail fins, levelling out into a shallower dive. Thunder rolled below them in the storm cell, and by now they were low enough that there was real buffeting going on. _Ten seconds!_

Dragon and rider counted them off together.

Three- Toothless snapped his teeth in, and keened into the night.

Two- Hiccup sat up, and the slipstream tried to pull him out of his seat. _This_ saddle, however, was one designed specifically for these kinds of stresses, and it held out nicely.

One- Hiccup's left hand came out like a pointer, clutching Framherja. His right pulled back, and a blazing bar of lightning formed as if an arrow nocked for release.

ZERO!

Everything happened very fast.

A bolt of plasma snapped out.

The target, a rather startled Skrill, turned in its own length and blasted out a bolt of lightning, hitting the plasma bolt just off dead-centre.

An eruption of purple plasma-fire and wild lightning filled the air between the two dragons, and Hiccup released his arrow-shot.

Framherja's lightning flew true, hitting the Skrill on the forehead.

The Skrill's energy, being of opposite polarity to the arrow, discharged in a flash, leaving it electrically neutral.

Toothless slammed his wings up in a brutal manoeuvre, shedding velocity as fast as possible.

Waitwaitwait â€" now!

Hiccup disengaged the saddle clamps, and jumped. A second in mid-air, flying forwards with the momentum Toothless was still shedding, and he hit the Skrill's inner wing.

It shook frantically, trying to throw him off. Hiccup had just enough time to slip his third and last electrical immunity ring onto the Skrill's middle toe before he lost his grip.

A moment falling through the rain-lashed darkness-

-and he landed on Toothless again.

Thanks for the catch, he sent breathlessly.

Did it work? Toothless asked, squinting.

Yep, Hiccup replied, latching back onto his friend. _No more recharge for that Skrill._

As soon as he was secure, Toothless began regaining lost height and speed to chase the Skrill down. _Good. Now, the hard part._

"Yeah." Hiccup panted for a moment, then resummoned Framherja and stowed her. "Convincing a Skrill to listen to us."

We always did love a challenge.

* * *

><p>6.3<p>

* * *

><p>"Good to see you, girl," Astrid said, scratching Stormfly's eye ridge.<p>

And you, Rider, Stormfly replied. _Can you do my nose? I can never reach it._

"Sure, Stormfly."

Astrid smiled, as she moved around to the front of her dragon and got to work.

In truth, that particular part of a Deadly Nadder rarely itched. (She should know â€" she'd been one a few times.) But it was a ritual, one they'd taken part in ever since their very first time back from Pern.

It was Stormfly's way of saying, 'I still trust you. Implicitly.'

Which meant a lot, to a girl like her. One who'd been so clearly _dangerous_, even as a wee bairn, that she alone had escaped the traditional Berk naming scheme â€" that of a name intended to scare off trolls.

Rumor had it that old Gothi had taken one look at her and decided that the trolls wouldn't come within ten feet if they could help it, scary name or no.

"That got it?" she asked.

Yes, thank you. Stormfly crooned her thanks, and Astrid felt a lump in her throat. Even after this long, it was still that important.

Speaking of which...

"Hey, hold up a sec. I think I see something stuck in your teeth."

Really? Stormfly's eyes went up and slightly distant, as she probed around inside her jaws. _I don't feel it..._

"Yeah, it's kinda hard to find. Looks like a fishbone or something." Astrid motioned Stormfly to the floor. "Open up, I'll get it."

If you're sure. The Nadder obediently opened her mouth, and Astrid reached inside.

Truth be told, there _was_ a fishbone. In fact, there were usually several, the first day or two of a new loop (before Stormfly had her habit of gargling seawater established, anyway), not that that meant anything. Dragons could handle fishbones very easily, and loop experience had shown that it was somewhat more likely for Stormfly to crash into a tree in broad daylight at the top of a mountain than for her to actually choke on something as weak as a fishbone.

But, well, Astrid paid her debts. And with her entire upper torso inside Stormfly's mouth as she worried the offending bone free, she was demonstrating her own trust in just as effective a way.

Did you get it? Stormfly asked, as Astrid slowly withdrew.

"Yep." Astrid held up the bone as proof. "Good thing I got it, or your breath would have _stunk_."

Thank you, then. I would hate to be a stinky dragon.

Dragon and Rider shared a serious nod, then both sniggered.

"Right," Astrid added. "Now that's out of the way, what should we do this time?"

Stormfly brought her spiny tail around to scratch her chin. _I've got an idea. You go around like normal, and I'll send some spines your way whenever you're in a fight._

Astrid considered, then nodded. "I like it." A pause. "Hey â€" why don't we tie ribbons around them?"

That has potential, too.

"But first â€" Hiccup and Toothless should be having their first meet-up this loop about now. Want to go ambush them?"

Stormfly bent to the ground, spreading her wings, and let Astrid climb on. _I did wonder why you didn't ping when Hiccup did._

Astrid scratched Stormfly's forehead, as they took wing. "What can I say, I've been wanting to surprise him for a while."

So you're going to glomp him?

"I resent that!" Astrid fixed the cove in her mind, sending the coordinates to Stormfly. "It's a pounce."

Same difference, Stormfly summarized, and then they dropped
Between.

* * *

><p>6.4<p>

* * *

><p>Good morning, the Zippleback broadcast.

We have something of a problem, the other head added.

"Yeah, what is it?" Ruffnut asked, then blinked and facepalmed. "Oh, come _on_. Not again!"

'fraid so, Barf confirmed. _We swapped again._

"I can't even remember which was the original order now," Tuffnut said. "Flip a coin, sis?"

We resent that.

Belch chuckled. _Bet you're the tail._

"Nah, it's got two heads," Ruffnut told them, holding it out. "Fire-head and gas-head."

Huh. Cool.

"Woo!" Tuffnut called. "I got the best head!"

Which one's that? Asked both of the Zippieback at once.

"This one," Tuffnut announced, tapping the gas head on the nose.

"That's not the best one," Ruffnut informed him. "This is."

It is good to be the subject of such a debate, isn't it... Belch said to his twin, as their riders began the process that would inevitably end in a fistfight, two nosebleeds and at least one flashbang use.

Barf nodded. _Very true._

* * *

><p>6.5<p>

* * *

><p>As the dark alpha emerged from the sea, Drago turned back to Stoic. "See? I told you, Stoic. I can control the dragons, because I alone am strong enough. Not by trickery, but by force! The only thing they respect."<p>

He ducked, as a hammer nearly removed his head.

"Yeah, yeah, heard it all before," Stoic informed him, swinging the heavy metal into a blur by the leather wrist-strap. "You control the alpha, the alpha controls everyone else."

He shook his head, chuckling. "Clearly you've never heard of delegation. Gobber!"

"On it!" Gobber's cheerful voice replied from nowhere obvious, and then the ground started to shake rhythmically.

With a huge _craaaaash_, the front of the ice lair crumbled away in a

slab sixty feet across and forty high. Growling sounds, like a fire dragon the size of a hill clearing its throat every second, echoed across the landscape, causing all the fighting to stop as heads swivelled.

And through the mist and smoke, a round cylinder nearly six feet in diameter emerged at about head height. (Well, head height for someone really big. Like, say, thirty feet tall. Put another way, it wasn't head height at all.)

"What is that?" Drago asked, quietly. Stoic felt an intense satisfaction at the sound of his bafflement. "Is it... some kind of hollow tree trunk?"

"Nope."

Gobber's voice came out of the air again. "For though I drive through the valley of the shadow of death," he said, still cheerful, "I fear no evil."

The air trembled, and something huge and blocky and very, very solid moved steadily out of the debris.

"Because I, I am driving the biggest tank on the planet," the driver finished.

"What is it?" Drago repeated, stunned.

"Oh, well." Stoic shrugged. "You remember Gobber? Well, he built this thing he calls an Irondrake tank."

"It's Standard Template Construct," Gobber supplied. "Much bigger than one of those silly little Baneblades. Now, then."

The huge cylinder rotated to point straight at Drago's bewilderbeest, and then thundered with a cloud of thick white smoke.

Something small and metal clanked off the dragon's head.

"I challenge you to a duel," Gobber explained. "That was a glove. Hey, Hiccup, Fishlegs!"

"What?" Hiccup's voice, fainter and distorted by distance, joined the conversation.

"Load armour piercing."

"On it, Sir!" Fishlegs replied eagerly, and then there was a series of clank noises.

"Drago Bloodfist," Stoic said casually. "Your heart is second hand and fuelled by the leavings of a Roman capon, which died of a surfeit of lampreys because it didn't want to face being associated with you. Your mind, small though it is, would be perfectly sufficient for a cod, because it knows how to use what it's got. I call you a dog and the son of a dog, and declare that you have every disease known to Viking medicine." (Both the Black Death and a cold, medicine being what it was in those days.) "Now, stand and fight me, or I'll beat you down where you stand and offer your blood to Hel — who's the only god who'll take it!"

Drago's eyes bugged out, then he raised his spear into guard position and fainted at Stoic.

Stoic replied by casually smacking the spear-haft hard enough to give rise to an ominous _crack_. "Want to borrow a sword? I'd hate to fight someone _this_ incompetent with _this_ little preparation."

The whole island shook.

"Reload! And aim left a bit!" Gobber called.

"You're the one who's aiming!" Hiccup shouted back, accompanied by some growling noises. "See, Toothless agrees with me."

"All right, then, _drive_ left a bit! And shoot it with some of the other guns, it looks annoyed."

Stoic smiled, as he listened to his friend, his son, and _his_ friend bickering. _That_ was the true worth in life.

Beating Drago's face in was a nice second, though.

* * *

><p>6.6<p>

* * *

><p>Stoic woke up, yawned, and realized he wasn't in his usual Awakening situation â€" mid dragon battle. In fact, he was in a bed which felt unnaturally soft.<p>

Ah, he thought. This must be one of those 'fused' loops Hiccup had told him about.

Now, what was it he had to remember about those?

At least he still had a number of familiar pieces of equipment in this new world. He dressed quickly, putting on his jerkin, armour, spiky helmet (because he was a _proper_Viking, that's why), and then grabbing his hammer on the way out the door.

As he hefted it, testing the balance, he entirely failed to notice what was written on the haft.

Whosoever holds this hammer...

It had a good weight, sat his hand well, and was clearly of solid construction. It seemed a bit heavy for the size, though.

Shrugging, he began looking for a training ground, in the hopes that he could try to disentangle his 'loop' memories while he was there.

* * *

><p>"Seriously?" Hiccup gaped. "You never even _noticed_ what this is?"

"Well... no?" Stoic answered. "Why, should I have?"

"Dad..." Hiccup began to chuckle. "Wow, you really can be oblivious sometimes."

He prodded at the hammer, which resolutely failed to even begin to move. "Turn it over, would you?"

Stoic did so.

Hiccup pointed at the haft. His father blinked.

"'Whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor.' So?"

"Dad, think it through. You were in a world where super powers turn up all over the place, you were replacing someone, and you had that hammer. And Asgard was missing someone. Does it make sense now?"

Stoic shook his head, then stopped. His eyes went to the inscription again. "Hold on a minute. Is that--"

Finally, he gets it. Toothless swaggered into the house, plucked a fish from the bowl, barbequed it instantly, and gulped it down.
Could use a little salt.

"Are you saying that... that's _Mjolnir_?"

"Well, _a_ Mjolnir," Hiccup hedged. "But, whatever, you've apparently got it now. Seriously, you never even noticed the strength increase?"

"Hiccup, I regularly throw farm carts at things to break up arguments. If my strength went up, I didn't notice."

"Right." Hiccup lay back, sighing. "Wonder if Framherja would react to it..."

* * *

><p>6.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

* * *

><p>"...well," Stoic mumbled finally, "This is... interesting."<p>

"Yeah, this happens sometimes." Hiccup grinned, flexing his wings. "So, Dad, how are we going to defend Berk against the vikings?"

"Give me a moment, I'm still getting used to these scales..."

* * *

><p>6.8<p>

* * *

><p>"So, that's the last loop with a Timberjack," Hiccup said, the morning after the loop-start dragon attack. "What did you think?"<p>

"Well, he was certainly big enough, and had a good attitude," Stoic allowed. "But I don't think a Timberjack's really the one. Doesn't play well with, well, wooden buildings."

Hiccup nodded, wincing. The sheer number of times that they'd had to rebuild Gungnir's housing after he'd yawned, stretched, and cut it in half... well, it wasn't a great sign.

"Fair enough. So, that's a no on Raincutter and Timberjack, a not-really for Monstrous Nightmare... what about Skullcrusher?"

"Skullcrusher, well." Stoic shrugged awkwardly. "You've said he gets on well with Eret, when he turns up, and... wouldn't feel right, really."

"True, they really do get on well." Hiccup noted that down. "Thornado?"

"Probably the best choice, all things considered," Stoic said, but frowned. "Wasn't there one other, though?"

"Yeah, the Skrill." Hiccup exchanged a glance with Toothless. "You want to try the Skrill, don't you?"

"Well... yes, I do." Stoic shrugged. "I mean, apart from anything else, there's what to do if Thornado's busy."

"Right." Hiccup nodded, then stood up. "Okay, Toothless, let's go hunt a lightning bolt."

I'd rather wish upon a star. Toothless looked up. _What's the plan for once we hit the Skrill? And which one should we go for?_

"I think number five is the best one." Hiccup got the saddle out, and began the routine task of clipping it on. "She at least seemed interested. Was that the impression you got?"

Between her trying to kill me, yes. Toothless glanced over at the watching chief. _Yeah, we've been researching this for a while._

"Actually," Hiccup said, thinking aloud. "Dad, you might want to have Mjolnir ready."

"Why's that?" Stoic asked.

"Well, remember I said dragons tend to respect you better if you can make fire? Well," Hiccup shrugged. "It's not certain or anything, but I have the distinct feeling that the same applies for lightning and Skrills. Probably also why Thornado respects you."

Stoic nodded, smiling. "Oh, this is another way of saying I shout a lot, is it?"

"Pretty much, yeah." Hiccup tugged on a strap. "Tight enough?"

Just about.

"I'll pull it a bit further anyway." He did so, before buckling it in place. "Anyway, the more I used Framherja the less violent a given Skrill got."

The saddle done, a pair of boots came out, and Hiccup tested their custom locking mechanism. "Think of it like sharing food â€" only, it's lightning."

"I see. I think." Stoic blinked as Hiccup took out a pair of spindly gemstones the size of fists, tossed them in the air, and watched them orbit for a bit before catching them again. "Er... what, exactly, are you two going to be doing? To the Skrill, I mean."

Yeah, this explanation is going to be fun, Toothless decided.
_Remember to include the bit where you go skydiving in a
thunderstorm._

* * *

><p>"Not much longer, I think," Hiccup judged, keeping an eye on the spiked form ahead. Each wingbeat was still powerful, but had lost the snap from earlier, and it was turning towards the distant signs â€" cloud formations, birds â€" which signalled land.<p>

_I think you're right. _Toothless rode an air pocket, skimming low over the waves in ground-effect. _Where on earth are we, anyway?_

His wings beat, once, and Hiccup tapped him on the side. "You're doing great, bud. Just a little further. And â€" huh, not sure, actually..."

The storm was long gone. After Hiccup had disabled the Skrill's lightning recharge, it had turned and fled southwest by south â€" following the storm for as long as it lasted, then further out into the sea. The long stern chase had taken the rest of that day, then a long night over water, and it was now getting towards dusk of the next day.

Perhaps she had hoped to lose her pursuer. If so, it was no longer really an option â€" Toothless, at least, had the option of getting food from his rider.

"Hold on, I'll check where we are." Hiccup rummaged in his Pocket. "Really should have launched a statite constellation before I started this... guess I'll have to do it the old fashioned way. Aha!"

Out came a clock set to Berk time, a sextant, and a small holographic map.

"Right, let's see..." Hiccup checked the clock, then the position of the sun. "Wow. Hadn't realized we'd gone _that_ far..."

What? Toothless asked.

"It's well past dark back home. Nearly midnight. But here, it's..."

what, still a couple of hours from dusk? Hold on a sec."

The sextant came next. Hiccup set it up, blinked, and checked again.

"Toothless... we're closer to the equator than we are to the pole. By a fair way, too."

Guess I don't know my own strength. Another tired wingbeat.

"Hang in there, Toothless. Just a bit longer." Hiccup put in the numbers, and managed a chuckle. "And don't get lost."

I'm guessing there's a joke in there somewhere?

Hiccup gestured ahead. "Welcome to the Bermuda triangle."

The Night Fury didn't reply for a moment. Then: _Okay, yeah, I'm kind of impressed too. We really got that far?_

"We _did_ fly for a day and a half. But yeah, I think this is one for the record books." Hiccup put everything away again, steadied himself, and got out a bottle. "Here. Potion, it should take the edge off that tiredness."

Thanks. Just throw it, would you? Hiccup complied, and Toothless caught the bottle from mid-air before smashing it in his teeth, drinking the potion, and spitting out the glass chunks. _I _needed_ that._

Below, the low bluffs of Bermuda came into view.

It occurred to Hiccup that the islands weren't actually inhabited or discovered by this point â€" so he could name them, if he really wanted.

That'd just get confusing. Bermuda it is.

* * *

><p>Once finally over land, the Skrill circled once and splashed down in a lagoon, apparently too enervated to try a ground landing.<p>

Toothless went for a meadow, shedding speed carefully until he was riding barely one side of a stall and then flaring before touchdown. They hit a little roughly, and Hiccup stepped free as soon as he could to let his friend rest a little.

"You okay, Toothless?" he checked. "I wasn't expecting the chase to take _that_ long..."

I'm fine, Toothless insisted. _Wouldn't say no to making the trip back the quick way â€" or having a few days off first! - but I'll live. Go check on the Skrill._

"Sure think, bud. Just call if you need me."

Hiccup scratched Toothless' jaw, undid the harness and laid it out on the meadow grass, retrieved some of the joints he kept for emergency

provisions, and left the Night Fury to recover.

Then he strapped on his armour, uncased Framherja, and went out to try negotiating.

* * *

><p>It was about a ten minute walk from the meadow to the nearby beach.<p>

In the time it had taken him to see to Toothless, the Skrill had clambered out of the water and shaken herself mostly dry. When Hiccup crested the dunes, she was stolidly eating her way through a couple of fish she had caught.

On seeing Hiccup, she turned, and gave a tired snarl.

Hiccup managed a grin. "Believe it or not â€" and I know how likely it is to be _not_ given how long it took to get here â€" I don't want to hurt you."

Snarl-hiss. The dragoness roared, baring her teeth, and carefully moved her wing-claws to support a slow advance.

"Seriously, you'll be fine," Hiccup continued, letting the stress flow out of his voice and attitude. "If you weren't such an uncooperative little minx, we could have solved all this much closer to home."

Another snarl. Hiccup blinked, as the hair on the back of his neck began to prickle â€" then dove to the side, as a bolt of lightning slashed through the space he'd been.

Well, dragon dung.

She must have worked the elemental resistance ring free at some point, and charged on static electricity alone. She couldn't have much charge.

But how much _more_? No bolts? One? Two?

Hiccup came slowly back to his feet, hand on Framherja's string and ready to draw.

Hiccup! Toothless' voice cut in, worried. _Stay where you are, I'll be right there._

No, Toothless! Hiccup thought back. _You're tired as it is. I can still handle this._

Like hel you can. I'm on my way.

Hiccup winced. _Screw it._

He pulled back on Framherja's string, creating a lightning bolt thrumming for release, and the Skrill growled at him.

Then he discharged it into the ground, drew again and fired at the water of the lagoon â€" producing an explosion of steam and a few dead fish â€" drew and fired again, blowing a tree to

splinters.

Then he drew twice more. Once, he fired straight up, a crackling bolt of azure lightning that stabbed the sky.

The second time, he fired squarely at the Skrill's back spines.

She screeched as the lightning blazed around her spines, focused and channelled by the metallic structure.

Then, as the electricity began to die down " absorbed successfully " Hiccup tossed Framherja aside onto the soft sand of the beach.

He spread his arms, showing they were empty, and walked forwards.

* * *

><p>Hiccup! Toothless broadcast, forcing a final burst of speed and taking the landward side of the dunes at a run. _Are you alright?_

He topped them, already gathering air for his first plasma blast, and then looked down.

Night Furies should not cough while preparing to fire. Blue flame blasted out of Toothless' nose, he tripped over, and rolled down the seaward face of the dune to land in a heap at the bottom.

"Told you I could handle it," Hiccup informed him, scratching the Skrill under the chin.

Toothless flipped his tail at Hiccup, pulling in both fins. _Bite me, human._

"Now that's just rude."

* * *

><p>"Time to head back, I think," Hiccup said.<p>

Really? Toothless raised his head. _Why now?_

"Because you're clearly recovered, that's why." Hiccup pointed down. "Look, you left a fish."

Toothless' tongue promptly hoovered up the errant minnow. _Did not._

"No use pretending now, I saw it." Hiccup spread his arms. "Besides, don't you long for the clear skies of Berk?"

Toothless scanned slowly around, waddling in a circle to make the point. _Not a cloud in the sky._

"Yeah, but I've got to wax lyrical or we'll be here for the rest of the loop."

Not seeing the downside here. Toothless flopped back down, and rolled over onto his back. _This place is sooooo warm._

The Skrill growled something a lot like agreement.

"Oh, get up, you great lump." Hiccup sighed. "They'll probably be missing us at home already, you know."

Nah, I took care of it. Toothless grinned lazily. _Bespoke Stormfly as we left. Astrid's been covering for us. Well, for you._

"I honestly dread to think. Actually, not knowing is probably worse... _how_, exactly, is she covering for me?"

She took a tent off into the wilderness and has been innuendo'ing about you and her for the last four days. Toothless levered himself up on one foreleg, enjoying the blush that spread across Hiccup's face. _Ah, that makes the whole thing worthwhile._

"Oh, shut up." Hiccup sat down heavily. "I'm not sure if that means my reputation is _ruined_ or _made_."

Toss-up, in my opinion. Toothless finally gave up trying to sleep, and rolled back onto his feet. _Okay, fine, you win. Let's head back._

"Finally," Hiccup said. Then frowned. "Okay, I know neither of you are up to flying for over thirty hours, so listen closely."

What about her? Toothless flipped his tail at the Skrill, who was listening with a polite incomprehension. _She doesn't speak Norse yet._

"Then you'll have to explain to her, won't you?" Hiccup started altering a set of harness. "Now, she's got a spiked back, so we'll have to do this the hard way."

Define hard way.

"For starters, I'm going to need to ride her. That or we rig up your harness to let me hang from underneath you, of course."

That's- Toothless paused. _Actually quite a tricky choice. Can I get back to you?_

"Not really, no."

Ergh... Toothless beat his tail against the floor a couple of times. _Alright, riding the Skrill it is. Be safe, Hiccup._

"Of course." Hiccup scratched Toothless' nose, and smiled. "Since when have I been reckless?"

Since you tried to pet a dragon. Which would be when you were about three months old.

"Yeah, yeah, I get the point..."

* * *

><p>"I know this is uncomfortable," Hiccup said, projecting his voice to carry. "You only met me a few days ago. But it's okay â€" just

listen to my instructions."<p>

The Skrill grumbled, and Hiccup stroked a spine with his shock gloves. The gentle crackle of electricity seemed to reassure her, and she subsided.

"Okay." Hiccup tapped her carapace. "Up!"

She started slowly, moving with care along the beach using her wings as forelimbs. After a few steps she started to run, tail extended behind her and moving only on her back legs. She swerved towards the sea, her wings began to catch the wind, then swept up, and with one mighty beat she was into the air.

Hiccup rode the wingbeats as she gained height, fighting to climb as the sand gave way to water.

I'm up, Toothless reported. _Gaining height, ready when you are._

Give us a minute, Hiccup replied, looking over the side. _I want at least two thousand feet of air under us._

Will do.

The air over the ocean was fairly dead, with little in the way of thermals. Hiccup had the dragoness circle over the island, picking up on the rising air from a patch of exposed rock, and they gained height rapidly.

Okay, ready for you, Hiccup announced after a few minutes. Aloud, he spoke to the Skrill. "Well done. Now, just level flight, and glide. Nothing more than that."

Reaching over, he scratched the back of her neck, and gently applied pressure to steer her into a flat trajectory. She rumbled in what was not quite disapproval, then complied.

On the way, Toothless informed Hiccup.

The teen looked back, seeing his friend matching heights and airspeed. On a waved hand signal, the Night Fury angled slightly down, shedding height for speed.

Slowly, gradually, he eased in under the Skrill.

"Everything's going fine," Hiccup said, soothingly. "Now â€" down a little." _Up a little._

Toothless got as close as he could without entering the bad air currents around the other dragon's wings, actually going a little ahead of her, then angled up and into contact with her belly.

Now!

Blackness.

* * *

><p>-and human, Skrill and Night Fury exploded into the air over the cove.<p>

"Easy!" Hiccup said urgently, as the Skrill nearly panicked, and Toothless dropped away before vanishing _Between _a second time.

"Easy, girl. We're nearly home."

The Skrill looked around " frantically at first, then with wonder " and allowed Hiccup to steer her down towards the cove.

Toothless rematerialized overhead, and pulled up to fly wingdragon. The Skrill shot him a glance, then shook her head and concentrated on her approach.

"Hi!" Astrid called, waving up at them. Next to her, Stormfly kicked over a huge basket of salmon and cod.

Is some of that for me? Toothless asked, interested.

"Probably," Hiccup replied. "Most of it's for our guest, though. Make her feel welcome."

Disdaining the water, the Skrill went in for a landing on the stony section of the sunken cove. Hiccup tensed, ready to jump free for Toothless to catch, but in the event she stuck the landing with a finicky precision.

"Nice work," he announced, climbing off and removing the harness. "Wonder what Dad's going to think of you."

Yeah, she's not even listening any more, Toothless pointed out, indicating the huge pile of fish she was already four cod into.

Astrid jogged over and kissed Hiccup. "Fun week, babe?" she asked, with a mischievous smirk.

"You... _could_ say that," Hiccup admitted, as she started putting a tiny braid into his hair. "I mean, thirty hour long chase, three days on a desert island, it all kind of blurs together after a while. Another long day at the dragon taming business, you know?"

Seeing his expression, Astrid tied off the braid. "There. And you know you enjoy it, Hiccup," she teased. "What kind of Viking would you be without the regular risk of terrible danger?"

"I don't know, one who makes things?" Hiccup chuckled. "Thanks for covering for me, Astrid. I think."

"Yeah, that is one downside," she said critically. "Ruffnut and Tuffnut are running out of bad jokes about us." Astrid tapped him on the chest. "But I'm sure they'll tell you all the same ones they've told me."

"Maybe I should just stay out here for the rest of the loop," Hiccup reflected. "It'd be easier."

* * *

><p>"So," Stoic commented, looking the dragon up and down. "This is a Skrill, is it?"<p>

The Skrill hissed.

"Oh, shut up, will you." Stoic retrieved his hammer. "Let's see, now, how did I go about doing this..."

Astrid watched with puzzlement. "Er, Hiccup â€" your dad isn't going to try hitting a dragon into submission, is he?"

"Not exactly, Astrid," Hiccup replied, from behind a convenient boulder. Stormfly and Toothless peeked out from behind other boulders. "Just, you might want to get to cover. Right now."

Stoic slipped the hammer onto the strap, so he wasn't holding any part of the actual handle, then began swinging it rapidly around with a sure, easy motion of his hand. The hammer-head accelerated to a blur, and began to glow.

The Skrill cocked her head on one side.

Astrid decided her boyfriend had the right idea, and dove for cover.

Stoic finally spun it one last time, and slammed it into the moss-covered ground.

With a surprisingly quiet snap, a tiny bolt of electricity shot upwards.

The teens and dragons peered over their rocks.

"Is that it?" Astrid asked, speaking for most of them.

"I don't think so," Hiccup replied, looking up. Prudently, he put his hands over his ears.

Cracka-BOOM!

Lightning blazed down out of a rapidly darkening sky, hit Stoic's hammer, and blazed off it in a dozen violet coronas.

Three of them hit the Skrill, running down over her spines and tail, and the rest blew chunks out of rock and tree for dozens of yards around.

Once the overlapping rolls of thunder had died away, all was silence â€" and the ping of cooling stone.

Stoic eventually broke it. "Well, lass, that's mine. Now show me yours."

A quizzical head cock from the Skrill was followed by a blink, then a sudden understanding. She nodded once, then spread her wings, and the air became greasy with static.

"Should we get out of here?" Hiccup shouted across to Astrid. "Right now, those bad jokes you mentioned sound really good!"

"No way!" Astrid shook her head emphatically. "I want to see how this ends!"

Women, Toothless commented. Stormfly gave him a look.

Any further conversation was interrupted as the Skrill fired. Stoic swung his hammer into the core of the blast, sending lightning skittering all over the cove (and setting fire to his tunic, which he hastily patted out again), then shouted and threw his hammer.

The Skrill ducked, eerily fast, and let the hammer sail on past her. She roared at Stoic " and got clocked by Mjolnir as it reversed direction in mid-air to return to his hand.

"Didn't expect that, did you?" Stoic asked, catching it.

After shaking her head, the Skrill scowled at him, and fired another, smaller, bolt. Stoic batted it away with a sure motion, setting a tree on fire.

Another one was deflected into the water, creating a minor steam explosion.

The Skrill gave Stoic a long, considering look. Then turned away.

"Hiccup?" Stoic asked, still on guard. "What does this mean?"

"Not sure, actually..." Hiccup admitted, watching. "Could mean a no, or-"

Walking back over with careful grace, the Skrill dropped her harness from earlier that day in front of Stoic. Then lay down, rolled over, and started begging for skritches.

"-that," Hiccup finished. "Looks like you impressed her."

"Glad to hear it," Stoic said, reaching down and scratching as requested. "What now?"

"Next step " learning to work together." Hiccup tapped his chin, considering. "Recharging her is an obvious one, but I think Skrill also have the ability to ride lightning directly. Basically, to her, you'll be a portable thundercloud."

Astrid repressed a giggle. "I'm sure your father will be good at it, Hiccup."

"Oh?" Stoic asked, looking over at her.

"Well, you _do_ have a talent for looking stormy," she said, innocently.

Stoic shook his hammer at her. "Just you wait, Hofferson, or I'll set my wife on you."

Astrid winced. "He wins," she informed Hiccup. "Last time your mother came after me, she was interrogating me about you for four hours!"

Hiccup shrugged helplessly.

Oh, the stories I could tell, Toothless broadcast airily.

Have the explosions stopped? Stormfly asked, popping her head up.
I only ask because if I get startled too often I run out of spines.

* * *

><p>"Alright, lads," Stoic said gruffly, walking into the council of war. "Attack's called off."<p>

Several of the men who, had he been Saxon, would have been 'house-carls', looked rather put out. "What?" asked Spitelout, speaking for most of the room.

"Well, no point now. Got bored, took my son and his girlfriend and handled it myself."

Gobber's tooth fell in his drink.

"Your son?" Spitelout asked, incredulous.

"He's built like a straw!" someone else shouted.

"And if you've got my niece in danger," Fearless Finn weighed in, "there'll be Hel to pay, Stoic!"

"Actually," Gobber mused, out loud, as he fished out his tooth. "If Astrid was along, I think of the three of them she'd be the one _least_ in danger."

Finn subsided, muttering. Everyone else voiced their general agreement with Gobber.

"Stoic," someone said, from the back of the crowd. "What are you talkin' about, chief? How could you just solve the problem, like-" he snapped his fingers. "Like that?"

"Oh, right." Stoic stepped back to the door, and knocked once. "I made allies. It's part of my job, making allies."

The doors opened.

Everyone jumped to their feet as a Night Fury, a Skrill, and a Deadly Nadder walked into the room (pushing a bit in the doorway, which really wasn't big enough). The fact that, of the three, only the Skrill did not have a teenage Viking riding it was completely ignored.

"Allies," Stoic repeated. "This is Toothless â€" he's Hiccup's new friend-"

Toothless waved, doing his best to look innocent. It didn't work.

Hiccup also waved. Despite the fact he was wearing armour, this looked a good deal more innocent.

Gobber, who had by now recovered from the shock, waved back. Even when not Awake, he accepted bizarreness quite easily.
"Afternoon."

"Thank you, Gobber," Stoic said. "Now, this here is Astrid's new friend, Stormfly."

Stormfly fluttered her eyelids. This had no discernible effect whatsoever.

"She can shoot five things at once!" Astrid enthused. Vikings being Vikings, this was actually a point in the favour of the dragons, and horned helmets began to peer back up from under tables.

"And, finally, this is Blitsif." Stoic had thought for a while about the name for the metal-infused dragon, and had eventually decided to mix the word for lightning with the name of Thor's wife "a warrior in her own right__" "She shoots lightning and rides thunderclouds, and she's taken a shine to me " Thor alone knows why."

She leaned into a scratch, eyes closing in enjoyment.

"Anyway." Stoic shrugged. "We blew up the head dragon, so they don't mind us anymore."

"Wait, that's it?" Spitelout asked. "You made friends with dragons and killed their leader, and that's it?"

"Well, they _are_ a lot like us, really," Stoic observed. "I got to know Blitz here by hittin' her with a hammer a lot. She zapped me a few times... you know. Bonding."

There were an understanding nodding of heads from the warriors, who were " after all " Vikings.

"Splendid." Stoic looked over at Gobber. "Now, if we can just head over to the arena, my son can start doing his thing with the dragons over there."

"Sorry we took your Nadder," Astrid added. "But she likes me."

Stormfly crooned.

* * *

><p>6.9 (Bardic Knowledge)<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup walked down the beach, Toothless at his side.<p>

"I'm just saying, you didn't have to do that. I had it all under control."

Please, we both know that wasn't true.

Their debate was cut short as they came across an old man, walking in their direction, seven bright canaries fluttering around him. Just

the canaries would have been of interest, being meant for warmer climates than Berk's, but the old man was curiosity, too, since they'd never seen him before.

"Hello," said the old man. "Nice day, isn't it?"

"Um, yes? I'm Hiccup-"

"Horrendous Haddock III," interrupted the old man. "I know. And this is Toothless, hm? A pleasure to meet you both." One of the canaries fluttered down onto Toothless's nose, making the Night Fury go cross-eyed.

"How do you...?"

Hiccup. This bird smells like a dragon.

"Very astute. I shouldn't have tried to fool your nose, my boy. Yes, these are my guardians, not that I truly need them, you know. But, my court insists I travel with them."

_That was a private message to Hiccup alone. Just who _are you?!_

"Haven't you guessed? Curious. I can tell you've met me before, though I cannot say the same. I am Bahamut, King of the Dragons."

"Bahamut!" Hiccup gasped. "It's a pleasure to meet you, your majesty-again, I guess. I think my dad would love to meet you this Loop."

"Loop? Fascinating. You'll have to explain on the way."

"Sure, sure."

* * *

><p>6.10<p>

* * *

><p>"Well, damnation and Helfire," Hiccup said absently, looking into the sky. "So much for a quiet loop."<p>

Toothless splashed noisily onto the beach, then shook himself dry. Water went everywhere, and a not-insignificant part of it went on Hiccup. _You expected anything less?_

"Not really, no," Hiccup admitted, slicking some of the water off with his hands. "And â€" please, aim somewhere else!"

I was. I was aiming for that bit of the beach. Toothless waved a paw somewhere on the other side of him from Hiccup. _You were just in the soak zone._

"I'm sure." Hiccup shook his head, then returned to studying the sky.

What is it, anyway? Toothless followed his gaze. _Oh. Okay, yeah,

that's a bad sign._

"Tell me about it." The rider squinted, then got out some macrobinoculars. "Well, I _did_ wonder where we were... that's a _Gloriana_ class, and there's at least six grand cruisers with her."

Hiccup lowered the binoculars. "What do you think, bud? Try and fight them, try and see if Leman's Awake, or try and stay under the radar?"

Well, we're pre-Heresy, if I understand the dating system rightly. Toothless padded over to where they'd left all their things. _But I'm still a dragon, and I'm a telepath. That makes me a xenos with 'extremely dangerous, kill on sight' stamped all over me. So option three is out._

"Just one and two, then." Hiccup exchanged a glance with Toothless. "Don't know about you, but I think I might give the first one a go... you can mount lascannons, right?"

Probably. Just strap them under my wings and make sure to put extra heat sinks.

"Suppose if worse comes to worst, we can head over to him if we need to. That or it is, in a very real sense," Hiccup winced. "Not our problem any more."

Spare me the occupational hazard talk. Toothless looked back up at the Imperium crusade fleet "now deploying landing craft" and shrugged his wings. _What the hel. Worlds are lost, or worlds are saved, and all that._

"By those dangers dragon-braved," Hiccup finished the couplet. "I seem to recall they were talking about Thread, not an invading army of superhumans."

Po-tae-to, fish. Toothless grinned at Hiccup. _Just "remember the shield generator._

"I swear, _one_ time we get blindsided by a kinetic penetrator, and you never shut up about it." Hiccup started rummaging in his pocket. "Godhammer, Stormbringer or Icarus pattern?"

Stormbringer. It matches my eyes. Or, rather, it will as soon as you paint it green.

* * *

><p>6.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

* * *

><p>"...What."<p>

That's what I thought too.

"Astrid, you seeing this?"

"Yeah. I'm thirding this What. Stormfly?"

_HvaÃ°. _ There was a pause. _That means What._

The four of them stared as the dragons dropped sheep, fish, and deer at the hooves of an enormous, fluffy pink pony.

* * *

><p>6.8 continued<p>

* * *

><p>"How are you two getting on?" Hiccup asked, some weeks later.<p>

Stoic considered the question, as their two dragons skimmed the edge of a steep mountain slope. "Hm. Well, she's certainly taking my weight better than Toothless did."

I maintain my opinion, Toothless broadcast promptly. _Whoever it was on Pern who said dragons could lift as much as they wanted never met you, Stoic._

"I'll ignore that crack about my weight," Stoic told Toothless loftily.

You ignore all the others.

"A time or two, she's complained a bit, but â€" strange thing," Stoic said, stroking his chin. "Always when she needs a charge-up."

"I did wonder about that," Hiccup admitted. "I've been trying to work out how Skrill metabiology works â€" I've never been near one for this long before â€" and I _think_ their muscles use electricity for power as well as control."

Stoic blinked, looking down. "Does that mean Blitz is a robot dragon?"

Hiccup laughed. "No more than Toothless is steam powered."

Chuff chuff, Toothless added unconvincingly. _Wait, is there a fish powered steam engine? I'm one of those if there is._

"Not really, but I think there _were_ steam engines with fish in the water." Hiccup frowned. "Not sure where I last read that..."

Blitsif made a moderately unhappy noise.

"Oh â€" hold on a minute." Stoic reached down to his hip, unlooping Mjolnir. "I'll give her a top up."

Forewarned, Toothless and Hiccup gave them a little more sky room.

When they were about half a mile clear â€" more for the sake of their ears than anything â€" Stoic raised Mjolnir to the sky.

Thunder rumbled.

Hiccup began counting under his breath. "Three, two, one..."

Lightning speared down out of the nearest clouds, curved around Mjolnir, and enveloped dragon and rider in a cocoon of forking and reforking bolts. The sound tore the sky in half, shaking birds loose from the few isolated stands of trees this high up the slopes.

With a sound like a ton of potatoes landing in three feet of snow, half the mountainside began to move in a huge avalanche.

Noisy eater, Toothless commented, and Hiccup sniggered.

* * *

><p>"Hey, Drago," Stoic said, striding forwards. "Leave my son alone. You didn't kill me last time â€" and you won't this time either."<p>

True on both counts, as it happened. Drago hadn't killed him, all those years ago. And as for â€" that other _now_ â€" well, that didn't count either. He'd had to use Toothless, mind controlled by a brutalized Bewilderbeest. And it hadn't stuck anyway.

That was Stoic's story, and he was sticking to it.

"Stoic," Drago replied, frowning. "You won't escape again."

"I seem to recall _you_ were the one who walked away from _me_." Stoic shrugged, taking up his trusty hammer. "Alright, Bloodface. Let's see how you do without your army."

Mjolnir gave off a faint whine as he spun it into a blurring figure-eight.

"Heh." Drago stepped forwards, bringing his spear up, and jabbed viciously at Stoic's throat.

Stoic dodged, casually, and brought his hammer down in a one-handed blow which spalled fragments off the rock.

Another spear-thrust was deflected by Stoic's left arm, which pushed the tip away, and the chief then used the threat of a hammer-blow to ward off an attempt to threaten his face again.

Skilfully using the hammer's thong to extend both the reach and speed of his strikes, Stoic began to press Drago back. Not actually hitting, not yet â€" Drago was still _very_ good, and Stoic had to tire him before it became a sure thing â€" but not letting him get in a proper attack of his own.

One near-miss which knocked a chunk off the spear haft had seen to that.

"What is taking you so long!" Drago eventually shouted, backing more quickly away from Stoic and staring over at the clash of titans. "Kill him!"

Drago's giant dragon roared, crouched low, and forced the white beast's head up â€" and a huge bolt of lightning skirled across its

forehead, dazing it and allowing Valka's friend to slip free.

Blitsif recovered from her dive, landed between the two colossal dragons, and roared, shaking her spines and letting tongues of electricity dance between them.

"It's called teamwork," Stoic said, advancing slowly. "Do you like her?"

Drago slammed his spear butt into the slush next to a block of ice, then swirled it once. His dragon turned away, looking at him for orders.

"Kill the Skrill!" Drago ordered.

Stoic glanced over at Hiccup, who merely stifled a grin.

Yeah, don't interrupt, Toothless added. It's not going to go how he thinks it is. Just have that hammer ready for the throw.

Stoic nodded slightly, trusting his son and his friend.

A huge gout of ice erupted from where Blitsif snarled defiance, mushrooming up into a huge ice sculpture over fifty feet high.

"That was your dragon, Stoic," Drago gloated. "A weakling and a fool."

Stoic didn't reply. He was too busy with his hands.

Mjolnir built up speed as he whirled it around his right arm, and began to crackle with eerie lightning. A hum built up into a pure, keening note, as though a giant's wet finger was running around the edge of a glass the size of Berk.

"...what is this?" Drago asked, and Stoic bared his teeth at the note of incomprehension.

"Nothing you'd believe," Stoic replied through his teeth, and let go.

The simple weapon shot across the intervening beach with a path straighter than an arrow – straighter even than a bullet, though only a few of those present knew what one was in the first place.

And it struck the icy mound, which smashed into millions of tiny pieces.

Hammertime, Toothless commented. Stoic didn't know exactly what that meant, but Hiccup bent over with sudden laughter.

Flaring her wings and shaking off sudden drifts of powder-snow, Blitsif screamed her triumph.

"The Skrill," Hiccup said, casually. "Strike class. These dragons ride thunderstorms. At least one has been known to be frozen in a glacier for a whole decade, and recovered as soon as it was thawed

out."

Drago's astonished gaze flicked to the young man, then to Stoic, then to the dragons. "What... what did you _do_, Stoic? How did you destroy the ice?"

Stoic held out his hand, and the hammer smacked back into it. "It's a magic hammer that shoots lightning, goes wherever I want it, and always returns to my hand. _Work it out._"

Another brief swing, and this time he held onto the haft. Stoic went flying across the beach in seconds.

* * *

><p>Stoic patted Blitsif on the head-plate. "Good work, girl. I'll handle this."<p>

The lightning dragon gave him a puzzled look.

He pointed to the still-shocked form of Drago Bludvist. "Sic 'em, girl."

Another look, this time of understanding. Blitsif spread her wings, and took off.

"Now," the chief added, taking a two-handed grip on Mjolnir. "This time, it's _you_ I'm interested in."

He whirled the hammer around twice, then threw it directly at the Bewilderbeest's forehead.

* * *

><p>Drago shook his head, trying to clear it, as the Skrill landed in front of him.<p>

He was Drago Bludvist. Master of all dragons.

He could deal with one pathetic little _pet_ like this. All dragons were his.

Sweeping his cloak onto his shoulders, he began a slow advance.

* * *

><p>Wait... Toothless 'pathed slowly. _That cloak of his..._

"Fireproof, yep." Hiccup put one arm around Astrid's shoulders, and the other around his mother's. "I love it when a plan comes together."

"Okay, now _that's_ cool," Astrid announced. "_Fire_proof."

All of them winced at the retina-scarring flash of pure white light.

* * *

><p>"Well, I have to say, I wasn't expecting it to turn out
quite like that," Gobber said, in the understatement of the
year. "You â€" _you_, Stoic the Vast, immensely strong but quite
definitely mortal, happen to have Mjolnir."

Stoic nodded, putting the hammer down. "Didn't realize at first, but
there it is. Go on, try to lift it up."

Gobber did.

It didn't budge.

"Huh, fancy that." The smith gave up, and lit his pipe. "Amazing, the
things you see now and then. This how you trained Blitsif,
then?"

"Bit of that, bit of punching." Stoic shrugged. "Ask Hiccup how he
chased her down some day."

"I intend to." Gobber switched arms to a hammer, adjusting his pipe.
"Need anything fixed after that?"

"Well, yes, actually." Stoic held out the bits of his buckler shield.
"Shattered when I dodged too late."

Gobber tapped one of the fragments, which fell apart
further.

"...I'll just make you a new one."

* * *

><p>"So?" Hiccup asked, as the loop drew into its final minutes. "How
did it go?"<p>

"Pretty well, I think," Stoic said, nodding. "I do still miss
Thornado, but Blitz and I have got on fairly well too."

"Well, use Thornado next time, it's too exhausting to chase Blitsif
down often," Hiccup advised. "That said, I might go have a desert
island holiday one of these loops. Nice place."

You're telling me.

"Right, right. Er... how does the whole, dragon awakening, thing
work?"

"Not all that sure," Hiccup admitted. "I assume there's some logic to
it, though."

Stoic nodded. "Well, until I see you again... take care, Hiccup. And
you, Toothless."

"Good luck, dad."

Stoic looked up at the angle of the stars, and then at the hourglass
in the corner. Only a few more-

* * *

><p>6.12<p>

* * *

><p>-minutes.<p>

Stoic actually saw the world restart, this time. He went from a quiet night in the main room of their house, the sea breeze blowing in and Toothless sitting in the corner, to " a large, warm cavern, with soft sand on the floor, light filtering in through gaps high up in the cone, and...

Dragons.

Lots of them. Blue and green, small, lithe ones " which were still at least as large as the average Berk dragon. Browns, larger and more heavily built. Bronzes, at least ten, ranged around the walls. And one great gold dragon, standing atop the sand. Watching, and adding her voice to the resonant thrumming that filled the air.

As his loop memories filtered in, Stoic came to understand what was going on.

This was Pern, the loop Hiccup spoke of in such reverent tones.

Around him was Benden Weyr " second-oldest of the Weyrs of Pern, and until recently sole surviving weyr.

That was a queen " golden Ramoth, largest and greatest of the dragons of Pern " and the bronze next to her was her mate, Mnementh.

Today was a hatching day.

He, Stoic, young holder's son from Lemos, had been picked up on Weyr Search, as a candidate.

And, in the back of his mind, a realization.

This is when my partner becomes permanent.

The whole concept made him nervous, truth be told. What if it all went wrong?

Something itched for the briefest of moments in the back of his mind " a memory he couldn't quite place " and then the first egg broke. Small chips of eggshell fell first, then a bronze head broke through.

One of the boys next to him stepped forwards automatically, bidden by something he couldn't explain, and bent down to help the hatchling out of his egg.

"He-" the boy's voice caught. "He says his name is Norith!"

Someone with a blue Benden-knot stepped forward, and helped the pair away from the hatching ground itself.

Then another egg broke, and another. The boys " and a few girls "

around him moved forwards, and he followed â€" still not sure quite what to do.

It was hard enough trying to remember he was a teenaged lad now. He felt... clumsy, was the word.

* * *

><p>Stoic could tell he was wandering, aimlessly. For the first time in decades, he was even less sure of himself than he'd been that night he went back in time.<p>

What did he do? Should he try to find a dragon? Or would that mean it went wrong?

Fear â€" a cold, creeping fear, not of what would happen to him but that he would ruin the life of another â€" worked a paralysis on him, one he hated but could not tell how to avert.

"Hey, that one's-"

"What's-"

Raised voices alerted him to something happening. He turned, almost reaching for a weapon before remembering where he was.

He saw a dragon turn deliberately away from one of the hopefuls, avoiding eye contact, and then look around for something. He saw another break the shell with one supple motion, tumbling out and coming to its feet with a balanced grace.

And then he saw their eyes. Both of them, in the same instant.

A wave of love and affection suffused him, through a sense he hadn't even really realized could exist until that moment. The full understanding that he was the world, to another being â€" and that they were the world to him.

Stoic! A deep voice said, inside his mind.

Who are you? Another asked, this one decidedly more feminine.

Hey, I saw him first! The first voice â€" which belonged to the blue dragon, he was now certain â€" paused, then continued. I am Thor-

Wait your turn! After that, the second voice â€" belonging to the green he'd just seen hatch â€" continued. I'm Blits-

What's going on? Stoic asked, thoroughly bamboozled. Why are there two dragons? Does Impression even work that way?

A third mental voice cut in â€" this one melodic, profound, and as wise as ages. Settle down, young ones. You must be Stoic.

"Aye," Stoic replied aloud, and saw bronze Mnementh nod to him.

Very good. I had wondered when we were going to see you. My rider,

weyrleader F'lar, will sort things out with the humans. Now, _ and here the bronze dragon's mental tone grew a little whimsical, _you three have a lot to discuss. I suggest you take turns " you're going to know one another rather well before all this is over._

By this point, the two young dragons had clambered over to him, and were standing a little apart.

"Right," Stoic said, sitting down heavily. "Both of you. I see."

How come you Impressed both of us? Thornado asked, cocking his blue head on one side. _I thought that was impossible._

Impossible or not, it happened, his clutchmate told him. _So nyeah._

"...yeah, I'm going to regret being too young for alcohol before this is over," the erstwhile Viking decided. "Okay. Do both of you remember Berk?"

Twin nods.

"Well, that's a start. Okay, my son, Hiccup, told me..."

* * *

><p>AN:<p>

6.1: Stoic has certain requirements in a dragon. Like takeoff weight.

>6.2: Catch the lightning.
6.3: Trust is important.

>6.4: I can't remember which head is which. That's okay, neither can reality sometimes.
6.5: From Hiccup's STC archives.

>6.6: This is what's called a "formative" loop.
6.7: Swap places. (Toothless is probably a bit put out by loops like this.)

>6.8: It's important to give any dragon a good try, if you haven't made your mind up yet. (Also - that fight scene just clicked, which is VERY satisfying.)
6.9: Not actually an admin. Just a very, very powerful D&D character, called Bahamut.

>6.10: Meeting the great crusade, head on.
6.11: The Pink Fluffle Puff.

>6.12: Okay, be honest, how many of you were expecting that? (They certainly weren't).<p>

Comments appreciated.

(edit - some of the text in 6.12 vanished somewhere. Should make more sense now.)

7. Chapter 7

Caution: these contain spoilers for the second film. And are mostly on Pern.

* * *

><p>7.1 (6.12 continued)<p>

* * *

><p>"Well, this is... different, to how we do things on Berk," Stoic mused, rubbing oil into Blitsif's neck scales.<p>

I was fully grown on Berk, Blitsif replied. _And Skrill are tougher than mountains, eat ironsand and spit filings._

"Guess that makes sense. Suppose that's something we have in common â€" I was an adult too, of course." Stoic felt her mind brush against his, and smiled again at the reminder of the still-new mental bond. "Wonder how this was for my son."

Oh, that's right, Mnementh said he was here before, didn't he? Blitsif leaned into Stoic's hands, eyes whirling blue-green contentment. _Ohhh, that feels so much better._

When did Hiccup first come here? Thornado asked, waiting his turn. _Compared to me, I mean, I know it was before you met Blitz._

"Well..." Stoic paused, then kept working at a complaint from Blitsif. "Sorry. And... I don't know, actually. What happened the first time for you?"

Hm... Thornado frowned, and lay down next to Stoic's side. _It's a little hard to remember the specifics... Hiccup had Toothless, of course._

"Aye, the only time that's ever changed that I know was when Toothless had Hiccup instead." At a look from both dragons, Stoic shrugged. "Long story."

Right. Well, let's see. Hiccup had only one leg, I think? The other one was made of metal. And Toothless had a red tail fin.

Thornado shrugged his wings. _I didn't really understand it all at the time._

"No, that helps." Stoic frowned. "That's how I remember it going the first time... don't know how often it happened after that, though."

And- Thornado stopped, his mental tone suddenly becoming quite sombre. _I left to help raise some other Thunderdrums, and when I came back... you were dead._

Blitsif flinched, nearly knocking the oil out of Stoic's hands. _What?_

"Aye," Stoic said, slowly. He resumed rubbing Blitsif, and didn't keep speaking until she settled back down a bit. "You recall that black-horned alpha â€" the one who tried to freeze you?"

Yes.

"Well, Drago Bludvist used it to force Toothless to..." Stoic's voice caught. "To kill Hiccup. I got in the way."

Both dragons' eyes whirled angry red-orange. They exchanged a glance.

_He dies, _ Thornado announced.

_Already handled it once, _ Blitsif assured him. _I intend to repeat that as often as possible, though._

"And... Hiccup told me, once." Stoic finally finished with Blitsif, and motioned Thornado to move over into her place. "He's never let that happen again, not when he's Awake. So it must have been what he calls the baseline."

_The baseline, _ Thornado repeated, eyes returning to safer hues. _So â€" that means before they went anywhere?_

"That's right," Stoic confirmed, rubbing oil into the cracked area between Thornado's wing shoulders.

I don't believe it. How? Thornado's head snaked around to look up at Stoic from below. _How could those two _not_ have Impressed by then? They flew like one being!_

"I-" Stoic considered that. "I actually don't know. Guess I never thought about it."

_I thought we did alright, _ Blitsif muttered.

"Oh, we did," Stoic said, patting her with his free hand. "But â€" well, Thornado knows, but I'll explain it to you. Back then, the first time, Toothless lost his left tail fin when he and Hiccup met." He delicately skipped over the question of _how_. "Hiccup rigged up a false fin, and controlled it with a little pedal."

Blitsif stared. _What._

"I know." Stoic shook his head, smiling broadly. "I'm _so_ proud of him, it hurts."

* * *

><p>"How much food do you two eat?" Stoic asked, hands on knees.

The two dragons didn't answer him for several seconds, as they devoured the wherry he'd hauled over from the table.

_A lot, _ Thornado eventually said, sounding a little sorry. _I'm used to fish, and it's been a long time since I was a hatchling._

Blitsif looked down at herself, licking her lips. _And I don't think I ever grew this fast._

"Aye, well." Stoic shrugged. "At least you're large enough I don't have to feed you any more. You nearly took my fingers off."

We weren't that bad, were we? Thornado asked, hurt.

"Pretty close." Stoic looked down at what was left of the wherry. "Do you want more?"

Hm... Blitsif gave the question careful consideration. _Ask me again in an hour._

L'ren, the boy who'd partnered with Norith at the hatching, shot Stoic a glance. "You know, St'ick, if anyone's going to complain about your having two dragons, just remind them that means double the workload."

Stoic nodded, wincing slightly at the reminder of what Pernese rider name contraction had done to his name.

It was probably some kind of cosmic payback, really. After all, his son was named Hiccup.

At least the dragons hadn't bothered naming themselves Thornadoth and Blitsith. It just sounded silly.

* * *

><p>"Right, your turn, Blitz." Stoic and Thornado stood back from her. "Twenty times each."<p>

I know how to fly, Stoic, Blitsif replied huffily, stretching her green wings out to their full span.

"And the point is, you _don't_ fly yet," Stoic repeated patiently. "You're still young, remember â€" not strong enough to fly. The whole point is to build flight muscle."

She looked contrite. _Right. Sorry. I'm just â€" new to this. Being young again._

Tell me about it, Thornado replied, looking at his own wings. _I built up my own flight muscles by swimming, the first time._

Right, let's see. The green raised her wings, then brought them down in a sweep which blew a little sand from the floor.

Okay, yeah, this does hurt. It's like I've not used them in months or years.

"You haven't," Stoic pointed out. "They're, er, new."

Two. Three. Strange-four-way of looking-five-at it.

Once she was done, Blitsif winced, and looked down at her chest as she carefully folded the wings in again. _That aches._

We'll get stronger, her brother informed her. _My turn._

Stoic walked over and began rubbing her flight muscles. "Good start."

Thank you. They watched as the blue beat his own wings, with a slower time than she had.

This is actually quite easy, Thornado commented. _No, wait, ow, stitch!_

"This could take a while," Stoic muttered.

* * *

><p>In the pre-dawn light, a blue shape moved across the north bowl of the Weyr.<p>

Thornado crept through the night, occasionally sniffing the air to make sure he was headed in the right direction. Straight for the lakelet at one side of the bowl, fed by a stream.

In the opinion of the once-and-future-thunderdrum, learning to fly was tedious and boring. Learning to fly when you already knew how was even more so â€" there wasn't even any actual learning to go with the rote exercise.

But learning to fly by swimming, now, that was fun. Any Thunderdrum knew that.

So, before the others had awoken, he had snuck out of their weyr. Stoic was snoring away, and Blitsif had barely murmured as he slipped through the door.

If a swim was good, a swim in the dim light of an early morning was great fun. The fish were still drowsy themselves, and easy targets.

Reaching the water, Thornado dipped a foreleg into it. Cold, but he'd swum in worse.

Then he took a taste. Fresh. Oh well â€" salt was better, but he'd swum in glacial lakes before. The only difference was that it was a little easier to dive, a little harder to swim up, and the fish were different â€" and usually smaller.

So he paced in. First simply enjoying floating there, blowing bubbles through his nostrils and snapping up a few curious fish, then sculling out into the deeper water near the centre of the lake.

Thornado looked down, at the cool blueness of the deepest spot. This should be a good start.

So he thrashed his forelegs, rising half out of the water with the impulse, then dove, exhaling to help him sink deeper.

* * *

><p>About half his own length down, he finally stopped descending, and spread his wings. Then, he began to swim.<p>

Tried to begin to swim.

A cloud of bubbles erupted from his nose as he looked back, at his wings, to see what was wrong. And, at that moment, he came to a belated realization.

As a Thunderdrum, his wings were built for swimming. They were designed to bodily push the water, easily able to move tonnes of water with every stroke.

But as a Pernese blue... he wasn't. He was built for pure flight. He was stuck underwater, unable to swim.

Had he been thinking clearly, he would have quickly realized that he could simply use his legs to swim. But Thornado was not thinking clearly.

He was shocked â€" by not having really come to terms with the difference in his body now from before. He was still not very strong, and already he felt a tightness in his chest from lack of air.

And â€" he was still a very _young_ dragon.

* * *

><p>Stoic! Help!

Stoic sat up, throwing his furs off. "Thornado!"

I heard it too, Blitsif informed him, coming to her feet in an instant. _Quick!_

She pelted for the door. Stoic followed, summoning Mjolnir from his pocket to use to reach Thornado faster. Secrecy be damned.

As they ran, the sounds of other waking dragons and riders began to come from other weyrs around Benden. Then there was a roar, and Thornado's shouts for help cut off instantly.

* * *

><p>By the time they were outside, the drama had played out. The little blue was lying, shivering and covered in slush, on warm sand just near the Weyr exit.<p>

Over him stood Mnementh, with F'lar disembarking from his back, and Canth and F'nor winging in to land nearby.

"Thornado!" Stoic called, kneeling next to him. "Are you alright?"

Blitsif lay down next to her clutchmate, pressing her warmer body against him. _What happened?_

"Young Thornado went swimming, is what happened," F'lar said, removing his riding gloves. "Ah â€" Mirrim. Get the healer, please."

A young woman nodded, and took to her heels.

"But â€" what happened?" Stoic repeated, now rubbing Thornado's chest. Water issued from his mouth, and he coughed and sputtered.

"Near as we can tell, he dove into the water and discovered he couldn't swim. In that order." F'lar bent down, and spoke more softly. "I heard he was some kind of water dragon?"

I was, Thornado confirmed, his mental tone a little weak. Stoic and

Blitsif exchanged a glad look, then got back to warming him up.

Back home, I'm â€" a Thunderdrum. I didn't realize until â€" you're right, I'm used to being able to swim. But I'm... different, here. Thornado coughed again, more heartily this time. _I panicked, and started swallowing water, and..._

"By the time Mnementh and I got to him, he was in a bad way," F'lar told Stoic. "We had to get him out of the water quickly, so Mnementh grabbed him and then we jumped _Between_ straight away."

Which was very, very cold, Thornado thought sullenly.

"Well, normally we're not absolutely covered in water," F'lar replied tartly, then looked up. "Ah, Mirrim's on her way back. And â€" uh oh."

Stoic looked up at the Weyrleader. "What?"

Lessa is coming, Mnementh informed him. _At least she has blankets._

"My lovely wife has something of a difficult streak," F'lar explained.

* * *

><p>I have decided that I like Klah, Thornado informed them, some hours later. _Especially that much of it._

"Thor, I-" Stoic paused, not knowing what to say. "_Please_ don't do that to me again."

Or me, Blitsif added. She half-extended her wings, then drew them in again. _I... do not like feeling helpless._

I don't like drowning, Thornado said. _I'll try not to again._ He paused, and took another gulp of the hot, spicy Klah with careful movements of his muzzle. _Is that what Between is like?_

"Yep," Stoic confirmed. "I've only been through wet a few times, though, and that was with both warning and wearing several layers."

Only once for me, Blitsif weighed in. _I didn't quite understand the warnings Toothless and Hiccup were giving, but it certainly beat flying for thirty hours._

I just wish I'd remembered to hold my breath. Thornado mused, finishing the Klah. _Mnementh said that I could have held it for five minutes even at my age._

Well, once you get better â€" and in the afternoon, Blitsif gave Thornado a pointed look, _then maybe you can teach _me_ to swim. I'm terrible at it._Skrill hate water â€" we short circuit._

"And yet she flies in thunderstorms," Stoic commented.

That's different, she told him loftily.

I'd be glad to, Thornado answered. _I look forward to it._

* * *

><p>"This is a big day, everyone," F'nor announced to the gathered dragons and riders. "For the last couple of months, everyone's been doing exercises â€" I hope?" he added, sternly, to general nodding. "Good. That should have allowed your dragons' flight muscles to build up to the point they can fly."<p>

His eyes rested on Stoic and his pair a moment, before moving on. "Dragons have flight instincts, but remember â€" they still have to _learn_ how to fly. What we're doing today is just the first step of that â€" first getting into the air."

He nodded to the circling trio of blue dragons overhead. "M'shal and his wing are overhead, in case anyone has accidents. Still take care, though. Now, which way is best for takeoff?"

L'ren raised a hand, and F'nor called on him. "That way, Brown rider. Upwind."

"That's right. Because the air is already moving, your dragons don't need to be moving as fast over the ground to get into the air. Now, let's see. Roleth first."

The indicated brown and his rider nodded, stepping upwind a bit.

"Spread your wings, Roleth," F'nor rapped out. "Keep them spread... little higher... that's it. Now, start moving into the wind... feel the breeze... and, _run!_ Flap those wings as fast as you can, Roleth!"

The brown accelerated, wings sweeping up and down against the air. Four beats... five... six, and his feet left the ground for a moment... seven, and he didn't come back down again.

Canth tracked the young brown, broadcasting further commands. Relayed back to the riders by their dragons, everyone got a running commentary.

Hold your wings out steady now, Roleth. A little lower... that's right. Keep them stiff and against the wind. Very good. Now, angle them back slightly, and you go up. Good.

Now, you need to curve your wings. Let the front bit go level with the ground, keep the rear part down a little...

The rest of the class watched as Roleth slowly descended.

Be ready to start running again when you land, you're still going fast. Down a little more... and... now!

Roleth stumbled a bit as he landed, but recovered well. His rider, D'ren, ran over whooping with laughter.

"Excellent display from Roleth there. Next â€" what about your two, rider St'ick."

Bet I'll be first up, Blitsif said promptly.

You're on.

Stoic sighed, then walked out to stand between them.

"Go!"

Neither Blitsif nor Thornado bothered to do what they were told. The moment they were at full speed, both began the kind of slamming, energy-intensive wingbeats they had learned on Berk and shot up into the air.

Once in the sky, Blitsif let out a roar of joy at her return to her element. She essayed a quick wing roll, then a wingover, and circled Stoic once before landing next to him as light as thistledown.

Thornado, on the other hand, went _up._ He climbed like a homesick meteor, waved to the trio of safety blues as he went past, and then went into a dive which concluded in a four-point landing, sending grass everywhere.

Oh, come on, Canth said, very quietly. And only to the loopers.
Show offs.

* * *

><p>7.2<p>

* * *

><p>"Hey, Toothless."<p>

Yeah? Toothless looked up.

"I built another new dragon training tool.

Yay. The dragon lay back down. _What is it?_

Hiccup held it up proudly. "A lasgun!"

...er, what?

"No, seriously." Hiccup tapped the stock. "I set it up so it uses a tiny amount of energy per second, rather than being... well, as powerful as it usually is. Which means..."

He pointed it at the rock wall, and pulled the trigger.

A small, bright yellow dot formed on the wall.

Ooooooh. Toothless watched it dance around. _Shiny._

Hiccup released the trigger. "Yep. Heard Leman make one too many jokes about Guard troopers being issued flashlights, and so..."

* * *

><p>7.1 continued<p>

* * *

><p>Thornado skimmed low over the herdbeasts, roaring and snarling at them. The herd's stampede continued, heading towards a low rise in the terrain.<p>

Now!

Blitsif beat her wings twice, rose over the hillock at a fair speed, banked her turn as the herdbeasts began to scatter, and matched speed with one for long enough to drop it with her talons.

Nice work, windbag, she sent, amusement robbing the epithet of any heat.

Not bad yourself, sparkbreath, Thornado replied, backwinging to land next to her. _Want the front half this time?_

Sure, she replied.

* * *

><p>"They're growing quite well. You should be proud."<p>

"Aye, that I am," Stoic said, looking up to see F'nor. "I wondered how they'd get on, at first."

"I must admit, so did I," F'nor agreed. "We've had multiple fire lizard impressions without so much as a blip â€" Menolly regularly has ten â€" but two full dragon companions at once is new."

Stoic nodded his understanding. "Well, it worked out. Must have helped that Hiccup helped train them both."

"Yes, he's a fine lad." F'nor shrugged, grinning. "Listen to me â€" he's older than me!"

"There is that." Stoic's brow furrowed. "Still makes me confused, though... how many other loopers are there here?"

"Well, not all of them are Awake. The harpers aren't." F'nor sat down, patting the ground next to him, and Stoic followed suit. "Let's see... me, my brother, his wife. She's not Awake this time either." F'nor tapped his chin. "Brekke is, Mirrim is, and Jaxom is. I think that's everyone..."

The brown rider then shrugged. "And their dragons, too, of course. No, wait, there's..."

You somehow forgot about R'ton, Canth supplied.

"No I didn't," F'nor replied, in tones of long suffering. "He's _not_ R'ton this time, and he's not Awake either. He's a Harper â€" the _Master_ Harper."

After the five loops in a row he rode bronze Zair, he will never be anything other than a Benden rider to me, Canth stated solemnly.

Seeing Stoic looking lost, F'nor waved a hand. "Don't worry about it. Local loop history."

"Right."

"And, between you and me, I'm pretty sure I've forgotten a few. Mind like a sieve, you know how it goes." He snapped his fingers. "F'lessan, that's one I did forget. He's my nephew â€" or, will be."

I can think of at least one other you missed, Canth added.
Consider it a memory test.

Stoic put his head in his hands. "I think I'm gettin' a headache."

F'nor stifled laughter. "Wait until you hear about timing it. I'm reliably informed that our admin would be pulling his hair out if he had any, because of that headache."

Canth stiffened, looking skywards.

"What?" F'nor stood, pulling his gloves back on. "Canth, what's up?"

Wirenth. Canth crouched, and launched himself skywards â€" without his rider. Excuse me, off to go continue an unbroken post-Awakening streak of seriously annoying bronze dragons.

"Well." F'nor followed Canth's flight path, until the brown winked between. "Excuse me, I need to go shower."

Stoic watched him leave. "Wonder what that was in aid of..."

His speculation was cut short by the arrival of Thornado and Blitsif.

Hi! they said, their mental voices overlapping. We caught another one!

On the hoof, this time, Blitsif added. I'm sure we could carry you now, what's the wait?

"Dunno," Stoic admitted. "Cost of making harnesses?"

Could be, Thornado admitted, looking down at his body â€" by now clearly pulling ahead of Blitsif in the size stakes. They've got to start some time, though.

"I'll ask," Stoic promised. "Well, when I get the chance, anyway..."

* * *

><p>This feels weird, Thornado complained.

"I'm doing the best I can," Stoic replied, fiddling with buckles. "Hiccup does this much better."

I don't think it's a problem with your work, Blitsif said, testing her own range of movement. _Mine feels fine._

Well... you're used to a harness like this, Thornado replied, scratching where one strap was chafing. _Loosen that, please... and a single rope was always all I had._

Ah, the simplest form of saddle, Blitsif snarked. _A rope._

"You know, I _could_ always just tie meself to your belly," Stoic muttered. "You'd have to land upside down, mind, but it might be less hassle."

On consideration, I think I'll endure the harness, Thornado said loftily. _Bit tighter on the left wing arch, please._

Stoic duly pulled on the indicated strap. "That better?"

Loads, thanks.

"We'll have to do it all again in a month," he warned.

_Yeah, but a month is a month. And at least we're finally going to be flying _properly._ With you and everything._

Stoic smiled warmly at the simple love those words held. "Aye. I've been away from the sky too long as well."

Who gets to go up first? Blitsif asked. _I'm smaller, but..._

Flip a coin? Thornado suggested.

You mean a mark, Blitsif responded. _And we don't have hands._

"Fine, fine, _I'll_ flip your mark." Stoic clipped one final buckle in place, and rummaged in his pouch. "Lemos or half?"

Half! Thornado called.

* * *

><p>Just bad luck, that's all, Blitsif repeated to the blue. _Besides, you'll get your turn today._

Thornado grumbled something.

"None of that," Stoic said, tone of voice erasing the sting. "She's right, you'll get your turn. Though why you're looking forward to carrying my weight, I don't know."

You're not that big, Blitsif assured him. _And dragons can carry whatever they want to carry._

"Tell that to Toothless," Stoic replied. "Never stopped grumbling about me."

Well, that's sort of an exception, Thornado said, looking up. _Weren't you almost as big as he was?_

Not quite, Blitsif corrected. _Half, easily._

Easy, now, Stoic sent to both of them. _This isn't about my weight._

You're the one who brought it up, Thornado pointed out innocently.

_And I'm the one who's going to _lift_ it up._ Blitsif crouched. _Okay, loudmouth, be ready to catch us if something goes wrong._

Thornado nodded.

Right, enough waiting. The green raised her wings, jumped, and slammed them down with all her might in the same instant.

O! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth, she broadcast, as they gained height. _And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings-_

What's that? Stoic asked, as Thornado leapt into the air below them. _I don't recognize it._

Canth taught me, Blitsif replied. _He likes it._

"Well, it fits," Stoic agreed, as they climbed past the shadow of the bowl and into sunlight. "Hel's teeth, but I've missed this."

There's nothing quite like it, she said. _Now â€" where _is_ Canth? I wanted to show him we were up._

"Didn't you hear?" Stoic asked. "Apparently he and... Brekke? One of the other loopers... they're sorting out a move to take over High Reaches."

Really? But Brekke is a queenrider, why- oh. Blitsif's mental tone tinged with embarrassment. _That explains where _he_ went._

Thornado reached their altitude, and pulled up into a wingtip-to-wingtip formation. _Canth, right? He's been smug ever since._

"Should I understand this?" Stoic checked.

Probably, Thornado replied, without elaborating. _Okay, you're doing alright, sparky. Now, give me a moment to get into catching position, and let's try manoeuvres._

Stoic glanced down, seeing Thornado slip down and sideways in the air. _Ready?_

Yep.

Blitsif banked, leaning into the turn. _Now, I can't decide. Rolls, loops or spins first?_

"I'm glad I've not had lunch yet," Stoic observed.

* * *

><p>This is going to be so cool, Thornado said.

"This is going to get me killed," Stoic corrected. "How did you talk me into this again?"

You're a Viking, Thornado pointed out, explaining everything.

"True. Okay..." _Blitz? You ready?_

Ready when you are. Blitsif slowed slightly. _Okay, now!_

Stoic jumped.

For about two seconds, he fell, air rushing through his hair and tugging at his clothes-

and then he landed on the diving Blitsif.

Perfect! Thornado announced.

"Whoo!" Stoic shouted, clipping himself to the Green's back. "Yes! It worked!"

Anyone would think you never were nervous, Blitsif said innocently.

"Of course I was nervous," Stoic denied. "What's the point of doing something like _that_ if you don't feel nervous about it?"

He's got a point, Thornado said. _Okay, I'm starting to feel tired._

Me too, Blitsif agreed. _Let's go eat._

"Just make sure to drop me off before you go hunting," Stoic asked. He then felt some communication between the two dragons "but not what they were saying. "What's up?"

Thornado dove slightly, angling in below them. Blitsif turned her head to look back at him, and winked.

That was all the warning he got.

"Whoa!"

The green dragon abruptly rolled over in the air, wings still spread but with her belly to the skies and her back to Pern.

Stoic grabbed desperately at her back ridge and harness, as the world turned upside down. _What in blazes-_

You did ask to be dropped off, Blitsif pointed out.

Oh, you're very funny. Stoic glanced down, seeing Thornado below them, ready to catch " just in case. _Now, put me back the right way up again._

Spoilsport.

* * *

><p>So, this is firestone. Blitsif looked the dull rock over, and sniffed it. _It certainly smells bad. Like rotten fish._

"I'm glad the smell isn't bad enough that I'm noticing," Stoic said. "What's keeping you?"

I'm nervous, okay? She prodded the firestone. _I've never breathed fire before._

I have, Thornado contributed, chewing with a steady gravel _crunch_. _Not something I do often, but I have._

He swallowed. _Well, I can't say it tastes nice, but I'm not eating it for the taste._

Stoic touched Blitsif's wing shoulder. "I know â€" but, well... it's another new thing. Like all the new things we've done here."

You're right. I just â€" I miss lightning. Nothing is quite like riding a thunderbolt. Blitsif picked up a rock in her jaws, flipped it into her mouth, and began chewing. _Erf, this is dry. Like eating... I don't know, stale bread._

After a few minutes, she swallowed. _Ugh._

"Right." F'nor, now wearing his new High Reaches Weyrleader's knots, was still taking their class â€" after all, he could do what he wanted. "Everyone eaten their firestone?"

Nods all round.

"Good. Dragons take a while to digest firestone, so it's the job of the rider to keep them well stocked during threadfall. Now, I'm sure you've seen dragons flame before, but let's just remind ourselves." He gestured up at Canth, who was _still_ looking insufferably smug. "Canth, if you could demonstrate?"

The brown nodded, head snaking around to point well into the air and away from anyone, and exhaled a stream of rippling orange-yellow fire. There was very little smoke.

But what struck all three of the newcomers from Berk was just how _much_ there was. It didn't have the sticky quality of a Nightmare's fire, or the intensity of a Nadder, and it certainly wasn't as all-around destructive as a Night Fury produced. But it was over two hundred feet long, spreading to ten wide at the apex, and went on and on for several rolling seconds.

"Canth is a big dragon, but I hope you all see the point," F'nor went on, as the stream finally subsided. "There's so much flame that it's quite dangerous â€" so make sure to aim where no-one will be hurt if you misjudge the distance."

After that sobering reminder, he smiled. "But you're here for practice. Let's start with just flaming â€" in threes, since there's

enough space over on the bare patch for three dragons side-by-side. The aim is to produce a good stream â€" it ignites automatically, so don't worry about that."

Thornado ended up in the third set of dragons to practice. His first few blasts were short, punctuated by coughs and hiccups, and entirely unsatisfactory â€" not until he calmed down and stopped trying to breathe like a Thunderdrum did he manage a successful fire-stream.

Blitsif was in the fourth set. Having seen the blue make his mistake, she instead resolved to ensure that she did not run out of flame early â€" resulting in the opposite, a cascade of flame which was long-lasting but entirely too thin.

Like him, her final attempt did pass muster, but it took them the longest of any hatchlings to click.

* * *

><p>"Suppose you must have been trying to breathe lightning," Stoic said, as she walked â€" panting, but happy â€" back over to the others.<p>

Yes, that's it exactly. When I breathe lightning, the blast happens so quickly it uses up all that I'd prepared for it in moments â€" so I try to make it happen slower. Blitsif's eyes briefly went yellow-orange, and she coughed up a pile of ash. _Ughh... that tasted worse coming up than it did going down._

She grimaced her way through another dose of firestone, and they watched the remaining young dragons practice.

Wait a sec, Thunderdrum said suddenly. _I think you might not need to have all that much of it â€" if you really don't want to._

Blitsif looked up. _Oh?_

Yes. Well â€" if we need Stoic to supply us, and there's two of us, then only one of us can fly to fight Thread with him.

That's true, yes, Blitsif said, nodding slowly in realization. _But â€" I do want to help. Just... this stuff tastes horrible._

"What about that thing Toothless did to get you home?" Stoic asked, frowning. "Do they need that here?"

Good point. I'll ask.

* * *

><p>"Between?" Mirrim frowned, then nodded. "Okay, sure. I'll teach you. But â€" Path hasn't turned up yet. My green dragon," she elaborated, at the polite confusion of all three. "I'll do it if you'll consent to giving me a lift now and then â€" I'd like to see Brekke, and of course she's moved away."<p>

"Why didn't you go with her?" Stoic asked.

"I have to be sure I'll be here when Path hatches," Mirrim explained. "It's both inconvenient and painful to try to manage otherwise. Don't worry, it won't be often."

"Blitsif?" Stoic asked, glancing over to her. "It'd most likely be you..."

I don't mind. Blitsif shrugged her head. _If you don't, I'm game._

"Looks like it's a yes, here," Stoic informed her.

"Right." Mirrim looked out at the sky overhead. "Well, it's still light... shall we start now?"

There was general agreement that they may as well.

* * *

><p>"Okay!" Mirrim shouted over the sound of wingbeats. "Going Between is something that's mainly the work of the dragon, but the rider can help them out! The first step is to have a mental picture of where you want to go â€" the clearer the better, but _don't_ imagine a specific time!"

"Why not?" Stoic shouted back.

"Because they can go there, and it just gets confusing! Right," Mirrim broke off for a moment, and checked the straps holding her to Blitsif. "Okay, I'm sending a picture to Blitsif, she should be able to pick it up!"

I have it, Blitsif announced. _That looks lovely._

Can I see? Thornado asked, then: _Okay, thanks. You're right, it does look nice. Where is it?_

"It's a cove on the southern continent! It's where I picked up Reppa, Lok and Tolly, my fire lizards! Okay, you've got the picture in your mind â€" now, go there!"

"What's that supposed to-" Stoic began, and then Blitsif vanished.

Stoic blinked. "Where'd they go?"

Stoic, Thornado said, strain in his mental tone. _I... can't do it._

"You _can't?_" Stoic repeated. "Why not?"

I'm... This time, the mental voice was full of disgust. _Scared. I tried, and then â€" all I could think of was water, and cold, and... I'm terrified, and I _shouldn't_ be._

Overhead, Blitsif rematerialized.

Are you guys alright? she asked, worried. _What kept you?_

Should I tell her? Stoic asked, privately.

Sure. Bitterness tinged Thornado's tone. _She needs to know._

_Blitz " Thornado can't help but remember what happened the first time he was _taken_ between,_ Stoic summarized. _I don't know what to do._

There was silence for several seconds.

I think I have a plan, the green said eventually. _Give me a moment to drop Mirrim off, and I'll be back._

* * *

><p>Listen carefully, Thornado, Blitsif told him, some minutes later. _Do you trust me?_

Thornado blinked. _Of course._

"And do you trust me?" Stoic added.

Implicitly.

Blitsif rose to match their altitude. _Okay. Now, here's what I want you to do. Close your eyes, and fly straight and true. Stoic will let you know where to go._

Obediently, Thornado's eyes closed. He held his wings out straight, beat them as regularly as he could, and flew steadily east.

"Up a bit," Stoic told him. "You're tilting down a bit."

Thornado's eyes slipped open to check.

Keep them closed! Blitsif admonished him. _Good._

She beat her wings several times, building speed, then half-furled them. Near-silently, she sped up to Thornado, and made contact between her back and his belly.

Blackness.

* * *

><p>-and, with a rush of cold air, they materialized two miles up.<p>

Thornado! Blitsif said, dropping away again and opening her wings fully once more.

Stoic patted the blue's neck ridges, feeling the dragon's chest heaving under him as he hyperventilated. "It's okay, Thornado. We're here."

We are? Thornado's eyelids cracked open. Then opened fully, and he gazed around him in wonder.

A blazing sun beat down on them, cool this high due to the thinner air but still warmer than Benden.

This can't be near sunset, Thornado commented, his breathing slowing. _Did we actually time travel like Mirrim said we could?_

No, this is further to the west, Blitsif explained. _It's about three or four hours earlier here, because sunset takes a while to travel._

I see, Thornado paused. _And -thank you._

Blitsif soared back up to their height. _Sorry, by the way._

No, you had to do something, Thornado replied. _I... I knew, in my head, that it was only as bad as it was because I was drowning and soaked, but in my heart..._ He shook his head. _Now, I think, I know better._

He tilted down and banked slightly, beginning a slow descent spiral. _Tell you what. Let's go swimming. The water down there looks lovely._

* * *

><p>7.3<p>

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><p>"I still don't know how you did this," Hiccup muttered.<p>

What? Toothless beamed, wagging his tail. _It's called subcontracting. Sharpshot was easy, you know Sharpshot._

The small Terror on Hiccup's head made a satisfied noise, lay down, and started snoring.

And Torch was almost as easy.

Hiccup glanced down, past his saddle and past the straps securing it to Toothless, to the back of the Zippleback they'd saved.

Toothless' own feet were gripping loops attached to Torch's necks, belly and tail.

"Yeah, okay, I get that. But to have the whole thing riding on the Green Death?"

I put a dragon on your dragon, so you can dragon while you dragon. Then I got on the dragon, and got a dragon on you when you got on your dragon. Toothless shrugged. _If you would only use that morphing cube, I think we can officially make this recursive._

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><p>7.1 continued.<p>

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><p>Blitsif dipped a toe in the water as the wave swashed up to

her.<p>

Oh, come on in! Thornado told her, sculling happily about with his legs. _The water's lovely!_

I'm sure, Blitsif replied. _I'm still a little dubious, though. I mean " we're creatures of air and fire. Water is kind of the opposite._

Do I need to pull you in? Thornado splashed, then dove, and came up in a cascade of bubbles and air.

I... suppose not. Blitsif stepped slowly forwards into the surf, putting down one foot at a time, and making sure she was stably supported by the sand at every step.

"You know," Stoic mused, lying back on the shore. "It's certainly _warmer_ here than Berk. There's that to recommend it."

It was about this warm at the island Hiccup and Toothless finally caught me on, Blitsif contributed. _Maybe a little cooler. Ooh... yes, that does feel toasty warm once I'm past the breakers._

She raised her head over a small wave as it rushed up to her, then looked more closely at it. _Hey, there's fish in here._

There's fish in the water everywhere, Thornado reminded her. _One of the main plusses. Food just swims past._

He waved a wing. _Come on! I know I kind of messed things up first time I tried here, but swimming really is great fun._

Last time I went into water, I had to be very careful to avoid getting my spines wet, Blitsif said a little tartly. _The time before that, I believe there was a small explosion._

Oh, that's right, Thornado said, nodding. _Sorry, I keep forgetting you're usually a skril. But Pernese greens don't do that, any more than Pernese blues do. Shards, we can hold our breaths for about a quarter of an hour right now!_

Usually meaning one life out of two... Blitsif observed. _But point taken._

She slowly lowered her stance, and the waves splashed against her until one broke over.

There. Better? Thornado looked at her anxiously.

...yes, thank you. Blitsif took a breath, then lifted her legs entirely and began to clumsily swim out into the bay.

Try moving opposite pairs of legs together, Thornado instructed her. _It should prevent you wiggling back and forth._

Stoic just sat in the sun, thinking.

This was, what, the third time he'd had an unusual loop. Once he was a dragon " now _that_ had been strange. Once he'd been Thor, though he hadn't actually _felt_ or _looked_ different, just been elsewhere

â€" which Hiccup assured him was pretty much normal for fused loops.

And then there was this one. Where he'd become a teenager.

He actually looked not a lot different from how he had as a teen back on Berk, and even the relatively short time he'd been here so far had been long enough that he'd really started to bulk out.

Something made him snigger. Was he going from St'ick to Br'anch?

Loud splashing issued from the bay. Stoic looked up, and saw his pair of dragons were now splashing one another, laughing like children.

Which they are, he thought silently to himself. _Here, anyway._

Even if, all too soon, they'd be deployed to war.

He yawned sleepily, and lay back on the soft sand of the beach. It was, after all, getting on for full night at Benden.

A nap couldn't hurt.

* * *

><p>With a wash of spray, Thornado landed in the water again.<p>

It's really more comfortable than a land landing, he explained. _Less difficult, anyway â€" you don't have to shed as much speed, and you can do the flare at a higher speed._

_I know _that_ much,_ Blitsif replied with a sigh. _I'm not stupid, I've done it in emergencies. But â€" what about when there's waves? And how do I take off?_

Well, when there's waves, you'll be aiming to come along with them, Thornado said. _Since the water moves in the same direction the wind does, if you do a normal against-the-wind landing you can end up smacking into a wave at high speed. Doing it with the wind is what I've always found more comfortable. But â€" try it out both ways._

He frowned, considering. _When there's really big waves... er, aim to land on one? That way, you've got a few seconds before the next one hits you._

I see. Blitsif absorbed that. _And takeoff?_

_Myself, I think this one's easier against, unless there's really big waves. You sort of... use your wings to do all the moving, and try to get into the air as much as possible. Though I sometimes do _this.

Thornado took a breath, and dove, leaving a few bubbles and then nothing.

Blitsif looked down into the water, looking for the Blue " but couldn't see him against the blue of the water.

Thornado?

Woo-hoo!

The male dragon erupted from the water, going at least four feet higher than the tops of the waves. His wings snapped out-up-down_, capitalizing on his upwards momentum, and a few more wingbeats " and a cloud of spray " left him climbing out of the water and into the air.

...okay, that was undeniably cool, Blitsif agreed.

I'm kind of proud of it, Thornado admitted, circling. _Let's see, what's deep enough for a dive landing " hello, what are these?_

What? Blitsif craned to look.

I think they're dolphins. They sometimes come as far north as Berk.

One of the dolphins jumped out of the water, chattering. Another peered up at the circling Blue. _Where's Berk?_

Blitsif gaped. _Did that dolphin just..._

Yep! The dolphin did a loop underwater, and swam up to her. _Hello! My name's Teres, what's yours?_

Blitsif, Blitsif answered automatically.

That's a funny name. It doesn't have th on the end. Teres poked her with her bottle-nose. _Are you sure you're not just pretending to be a dragon?_

_I _am_ a dragon!_ Blitsif insisted, thoroughly confused. _I've got wings and everything._

Could just be seaweed, another dolphin said, nodding sagely. _I'm John, strange not-a-dragon._

But... Blitsif looked up at Thornado for help. _What can I even say to them?_

You could say hello, Teres said, chattering laughter. _It's only polite._

They have a point, Thornado agreed, splashing down a safe distance away and swimming over. _I must admit, though, I didn't know about the telepathic dolphins they have here._

By now, the whole pod was clamouring around Blitsif, swapping jokes and asking questions.

Help, Blitsif pleaded. _I feel like I'm being mobbed by Terrors._

Thornado just started laughing.

* * *

><p>Stoic reached into the panniers, pulled free a lump of firestone, and supplied it to Thornado. Here.

Thanks. Thornado crunched it down, and trimmed his wings slightly to maintain formation on Norith and Roleth. _When is it going to-_

There! Stoic pointed at the falling clumps.

Good spot. Thornado relayed the position to the rest of the wing, and followed as L'ren and Norith climbed to engage. _I have the left clump._

Confirmed, Norith sent back, which Thornado relayed to Stoic.

Stoic's eyes were constantly in motion, watching the whole sky while his dragon was focused on the clump. It was part of his job, to free Thornado to-

There!

Gouts of flame issued from Norith, then the browns flanking him, and finally from the blues forming the fringes of the wing. There was a moment of light and heat, and then black ash blew over them.

"Good work!" K'net called, his bronze dropping down to fly just above them. "Those ratty old fishing nets won't be troubling Pern again."

A few of the riders stifled laughter.

"Well, that's the last training session. Thread falls over Bitra tomorrow â€" your wing is assigned to my section," he added. "I'm sure you'll do well."

To his surprise, Stoic found himself looking forward to it.

Okay, just how bloody much of a Viking am I? He asked himself. _One year of peace and quiet and I'm champing at the bit to go incinerate death-pasta from space..._

Peace and quiet is another word for boredom, Thornado volunteered.

At that point, K'net's bronze, Piaynth, folded in one wing and dove like a brick.

What's- Thornado craned his head down to watch, banking slightly to allow Stoic to watch. _He's going to hit the ground if he doesn't pull out!_

Stoic suddenly realized what _might_ be going on. But either way... _Blitsif! Can you catch him?_

Almost instantly, the former Skrill burst into being alongside the falling Piyanth. A moment's motion, and both dragons

vanished.

Shouting and confusion broke out among the riders overhead.

Barely two seconds later, they erupted back into the real " just over the shallow lake, and going slowly and horizontally. Blitsif soared up and away, and Piyanth kissed the water with a splash before spreading his wings once more and ascending with powerful wingbeats.

It was a test, Blitsif said, sounding hurt. _K'net and Piyanth wanted to see if I really could catch them._

Well, you did, Stoic sent back. _Nice work._

Thanks, and now Blitsif sounded a little mollified.

"Nice work from your green, there, St'ick," K'net confirmed, rising back to their altitude. "Might be an idea to have a few other greens trained to do that as well " saving dragons is near as important as fighting Thread, and greens have less endurance than the other breeds anyway."

He flew a little closer to Stoic, and spoke more quietly. "Timing it is okay to make the catch, but tell her to be careful about it " and _don't_ time it on the drop. There's too much of a risk of being in the same place twice."

"I'll tell her," Stoic replied, nodding. "Is the lake a good place?"

May as well, Thornado muttered. _It's not like it's hard to land there._

"Should be," K'net allowed. "A few healers can set up there."

* * *

><p>Stoic closed his eyes, as ash blew over them.<p>

Left! Thornado warned, giving his rider just enough time to brace himself before hauling around in a brutally tight turn and flaming a clump of Thread.

A spout of coordinated flame from one of the wings further down incinerated a sheet of falling... _space stuff,_ Stoic mentally labelled it. The remnants dropped a little lower, before being caught by a green riding sweeper.

This is taking bloody ages, Stoic grumbled. _How long have we been up here, two hours?_

Nearly. Thornado rejoined L'ren's wing, and they climbed hard for another sheet. _Halfway there._

"Oh, sod this for a game of Romans." Stoic took the most important object in his Pocket, and raised it. "Fly straight, would you?"

Er... Thornado eyed the hammer. _What's that?_

"Mjolnir," Stoic informed him, and with a crack-THOOOOM, bolts of lightning blazed skywards. They hit the oncoming Thread, raced up it in an instant, and reduced it to blackened ash.

Mjolnir continued to crackle, and Stoic tapped Thornado's flank. "Higher!"

The blue answered obediently to the instruction, head tilted sideways to watch the fireworks.

As each wave of Thread came down, Mjolnir hummed and struck it from the continuum. Higher and higher they rose, up past the rest of the fighting wings, and into thinner air.

Well, the Benden dragons have got their act together, Blitsif reported from below. _They're catching what you miss._

Glad to hear it, Stoic sent back.

And I really like what you're doing with the lightning. I kind of miss lightning-blasts now...

Mnementh materialized next to them. F'lar waved from his back, and they kept prudently out of the line of fire. "Finally got too much for you, did it?" the Weyrleader called.

"Aye!" Stoic replied, and Mjolnir hummed as it launched another bolt.

"Well..." F'lar considered. "We'll pass it off as Thornado doing it, or something. Dragons can do mysterious stuff sometimes."

I can lift things with my mind, Mnementh announced. _And, you know, time travel and suchlike._

"Glad to hear it," Stoic said, spotting a number of Threads still unravelling from their space-travelling pods. A spin of Mjolnir, and he aimed for them. "Okay, let's-"

The sky lit up with a trail of lightning, spreading up and drawing a line of crackling blue into the heavens as far as the eye could see.

"Huh," F'lar said, squinting. "Mnementh?" He paused, then went on. "You seem to have got... all of them."

"...pardon?" Stoic lowered the hammer, panting, and then stowed it. "How does _that_ work?"

"Something about superconductivity, I think." F'lar banked Mnementh. "Dear one, do tell everyone they can go home now."

Mnementh rumbled agreement.

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><p>Is that actually possible? Blitsif asked. _I mean, if Mnementh can move things with his mind, and all dragons here are telepathic, shouldn't it be possible to do lightning?_

"That's a pretty big should," Felessan replied. (Officially, the ten-year-old was being kept busy by St'ick and his dragons while his parents were in a conference.) "I mean, Golanth and I have probably done the most experiments about this kind of thing â€" Dad's too busy most of the time, and we discovered it anyway â€" and we haven't found electricity."

But have you looked? Blitsif pressed.

"Well, not really..."

Right. Blitsif nodded. _Then that's what I'm going to try and find out._

"Fair enough." Felessan sat back, leaning against Thornado's back. "Man, it's good to have visitors sometimes. Uncle F'nor is just... weird, Jaxom's busy with learning Hold stuff, and none of the Harpers are Awake."

"F'nor?" Stoic repeated. "I quite liked him. Reminded me a bit of Gobber, for some reason."

"Oh, that's _right_, you're from the place H'cup and Toothleth from." Felessan snapped his fingers together. "Those two are cool. Jaxom, Ruth, Golly and I have been to Berk, a couple of times." He sniggered. "We had great fun messing with the chief. What was his name..."

"Stoic," Stoic said severely. "How exactly did you 'mess with' me?"

Felessan blinked, then turned red. "Oh, shards..."

"Don't worry!" Stoic started to chuckle. "I just wanted to see your face. But â€" really, what _did_ you do?"

Felessan stared at the floor. "Um, set your house on fire, then had a dragon fire brigade turn up?"

"Dragon... fire brigade?" Stoic repeated. "How'd you do that? Scauldron? Big buckets?"

"Ruth went _Between_ and dumped freezing cold water on your house. And, er, on you. Three times." By now Felessan's voice was almost a squeak. "And he got all the Terrors to help, too. _All_ of them. Within a hundred miles."

Can I see what that looked like? Thornado asked, curious.

"Okay." Felessan frowned in concentration.

Thornado started giggling. _You looked like a drowned rat, Stoic!_

Ooh, can I see? Blitsif asked, then started laughing as well. At a silent request from Stoic, she sent him the image.

"_Right._" Stoic stood up, towering over the young rider-to-be. "Fair enough."

Felessan coughed. "_Pardon?_" he asked, incredulously.

"Well, I was a bit of a tosser before my son straightened me out." Stoic sighed. "I probably did deserve it." A thought occurred to him. "Actually, speaking of sons... how does that work, exactly?"

Felessan looked up. "How does what work?"

"Well, I've been told that this start for your loop was later than normal. Actually, from what F'lar said, it was before you were born. So... er... how does _that_ work? You're a looper, your mother is a looper, your father's an Anchor, and the loop starts before you were born."

Felessan made an _ah_ of understanding. "Right, I see what you mean. As I understand it, loopers can only have children if they had them in the baseline, and they basically always do when appropriate. No children in the baseline... no children."

"Right, I... see." Stoic took a moment to absorb the implications of that.

That meant that, no matter what happened in the future of the loops, Hiccup was the only child he'd ever have.

Not quite, Blitsif pointed out. _Him and Toothless. Like twins born to different species._

...okay, have you been reading poetry? Thornado asked, incredulously. _I mean, you're supposed to be a Skrill. You know, the ones who live for killing._

"That's whisperin' death," Stoic corrected. "Skrill aren't _quite_ that nasty."

Blitsif stuck her tongue out. _No, I haven't been reading poetry. I've been _listening_ to it. I want to improve my image._

Felessan laughed, relieved. "Shells... Hiccup must have had quite an effect on you."

"He did that," Stoic confirmed.

* * *

><p>Near the end of the second decade of the Ninth Pass, Stoic was relaxing in his room with Blitsif (Thornado was out swimming) when a litany of curses began to approach through the door.<p>

The curses strengthened, then stopped, and someone knocked on the door.

"It's open," he called.

With a soft creak, the door swung open. A dark-haired young man came in, wearing riding leathers.

He actually looked surprisingly like Hiccup, in a way â€" though

there were undeniable differences, as well.

"Sharding paperwork, sharding Lytol, and damn F'nor," the young man said, evidently concluding his litany of oaths from before. "Sorry. I'd have come to see you turns ago, but..." He dropped his gloves on a shelf, and sat down. "For some reason, whenever F'nor becomes weyrleader of High Reaches, my free time evaporates until I'm nearly twenty."

"...should I know you?" Stoic asked.

"Oh, sorry. Jaxom, Lord Holder of Ruatha."

"Ah, I remember." Stoic nodded. "The one who Impressed Ruth? And a looper, I recall."

"That's correct. May Ruth come in?"

Blitsif shifted off her place to allow Ruth to land, and the white did so gracefully.

"I know you've met all the other loopers some time ago. I'd have come, but â€" like I say." He shrugged helplessly. "At least we don't have to save that queen egg when this happens..."

"I have the feeling your life is... complicated," Stoic said, delicately.

"You do not know the_ half _of it," Jaxom confirmed with feeling. "Anyway, enough about my troubles, they're old news. What I wanted to ask is â€" how's Hiccup?"

Stoic began to respond, then chided himself. Of course most of the loopers here would know his son well.

So, considering that, he spent a while thinking about how to answer.

"I think... well," he said, eventually. "He's never spoken about it, but I think my looping has taken a weight off his shoulders. The impression I get is... he was always guilty, he and Toothless both, about what happened with Drago â€" you do know about that?" he checked, and Jaxom nodded.

"Yes, I do. I still remember when he came here straight after a loop where Toothless wasn't awake, he messed up, and it happened again." Jaxom winced. "He... wasn't happy."

Toothless was nearly inconsolable over it, Ruth put in. _It still ranks as the worst moment of his life, I think._

"Aye." Stoic's voice wobbled slightly, and he swallowed. "Aye. Anyway, he seems happy now, so I can only assume that means he's better."

He spent quite a long time trying to find a dragon for Stoic, as I understand it, Blitsif said. _I was the final option._

"And the blue?" Jaxom asked.

Baseline. She tossed her head. _He's alright, I suppose._

"Huh." Jaxom considered that, then shrugged. "Fair enough, then." He then looked over to Stoic again. "And how have _you_ been dealing with looping? Especially here, on Pern?"

"It's a help, certainly," Stoic nodded. "Quite apart from not dying, I can reconcile with my wife earlier, avoid making so many mistakes with Hiccup... aye, my life has gone better. And as for Pern..." He smiled, slightly distant. "It's allowed me to truly talk to Thornado and Blitsif, and that's beyond price. And you've all helped, where you could, as well."

"Well, glad to hear it." Jaxom looked slightly uncomfortable. "Er â€" if you've been having problems when... was it Blitsith?"

Blitsif, she corrected him. _Blitz is lightning, Sif is the wife of Thor._

"Right. Anyway... you _have_ been coping when she rises, right?" Jaxom pursed his lips, trying to find the words. "To mate."

Stoic blinked. "Never thought about that, to be honest. And now that I do, I don't think she _has._ Risen, I mean."

Not once, she confirmed.

"But... er..." Jaxom looked thoroughly confused. "I mean, Ruth doesn't get involved in that sort of thing because he's technically a sport, but-"

Oh, I see. Blitsif flipped her tail. _No, not interested. None of the dragons here interest me â€" too large, for the most part; not nearly purple enough; no spines; and not one of them can manage a decent lightning bolt._

Jaxom digested that.

"Oh, I _see_ now," Stoic said. "You're only attracted to Skrill, right?"

_Yes, that's it exactly. Why should my preferences change just because my shape does? I mean, if I already _was_ in love with someone, that might change, but as it is?_

"A fair point indeed," Jaxom agreed. "Now, I did manage to get a few hours free from my interminable meetings and tuition, so I think we've got enough time for me to tell you about your son's time here."

"That sounds _perfect,_" Stoic said, with a smile. "I missed so much of what was important to him... even hearing about it would be enough."

I'll ask Thornado to pick up some wineskins on the way up, Blitsif volunteered.

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><p>7.4<p>

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><p>"I alone rule the dragons!" Drago stated, swinging his spear. He stepped forward-<p>

And the painted cloth he stepped on gave way, resulting in what could only be termed a _plummet_.

"Yes!" Hiccup said, punching the air. Toothless keened triumph beside him.

With no-one else Looping, Hiccup had pulled an old prank â€" and an old set of measurements â€" out of storage. The night before, they had crept down to the beach near his mother's sanctuary and dug a hole.

A very small hole. A very deep hole. A hole which was precisely sized to fit one (1) Drago Bludvist.

And a hole placed exactly where Drago would step, if everything went baseline up to that precise moment.

Worth losing my tail fin for, right there, Toothless declared, sauntering over to the hole and kicking a stone into it.

An echoing "Ow!" was his reward.

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><p>7.5<p>

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><p>Ah, the morning after the night before, Hiccup sent to Toothless, sawing some planks. _The day we repair everything that your lot broke in the village._

I seem to recall you weren't entirely without fault, Toothless replied, sunning himself on a branch half a mile into the forest. _I mean, you did pick a terrible place to hide from that Nightmare. Again._

I know, I know. Hiccup passed another plank over to Astrid, who hammered in the nails for it with a sure, fluid motion.

"Thanks, babe. Looks like the next one we need is... two feet long, four inches wide."

"Coming up." Hiccup resumed sawing. "Wonder when Gobber's going to notice his dragons are all missing?"

"Never," Snotlout assured him. "Saw him using that Terror of his as a lighter when he thought no-one was looking. He's Awake too."

"Well, so are the twins, and Fishlegs... huh." Hiccup passed the next plank to Astrid. "Looks like everyone except Dad is Awake."

A low _boom_ interrupted their conversation.

"What was that?" Snotlout asked, half-turning and reaching for something. "I don't remember this happening before."

"Sounded like a Thunderdrum," Hiccup supplied. "Fish?"

Fishlegs hurried over, trailed by the twins. "Yes, definitely a Thunderdrum. Male, slightly immature, a bit on the small size, and carrying a heavy load."

"Okay, see," Snotlout pointed. "_This_ is what creeps me out sometimes. How the _Hel_ can you tell all that from one bang noise?"

"Timbre, reverberation, and duration," Fishlegs ticked off. "In this case, I can also-"

Another low _boom._

"Yep, it's getting closer," Fishlegs confirmed. "And it's coming from... there!"

He pointed.

Most of Berk were listening by now, and they all turned to look.

There was a crackle of lightning, and a crash of thunder. Out of the flash appeared two huge shapes – one squat and blue, the other long, graceful, and a purple so dark it was nearly black.

And, hanging between them, was a seat.

In that seat, holding a large hammer, was Stoic the Vast. Chief of the Hairy Hooligans of Berk.

"What in the name of Nidhoggr..." Astrid breathed, a sentiment echoed in general by everyone in earshot. "Did I miss something when I Woke up yesterday?"

"Nope," Hiccup replied. "Nothing unusual I can remember either."

"Then what is your dad doing in _that?_"

While they spoke, the accumulation had swept closer. It slowed, the two dragons beating their wings in time, and then settled to the ground, the ropes going slack.

Stoic stepped forward, and raised his hammer.

"Morning!" he said, cheerfully. "Meet my new friends, Thornado and Blitsif. They're both softies, really."

Toothless? Hiccup sent, suddenly filled with a wild surmise.

Already in the air, Toothless replied. _And –_ yep. Both of them._

"Dad!" Hiccup said, aloud. "_Seriously?_ _Both_ of them?"

"Yep," Stoic replied, addressing him directly now. "Oh â€" Jaxom sends his regards, by the way."

"Oh, you lucky bastard." Hiccup shook his head, advancing into the â€" large â€" clear space around his father and his dragons. "What were they?"

Blue and green, Thornado informed him. _I'll let you guess which one was which._

With a windrush, Toothless alighted in the cleared space. _I'm not being left out of this one. Hi, Blitsif. Nice to meet you properly, Thornado._

He gestured over his shoulder, to where other dragons were appearing â€" Stormfly, Hookfang, Barf and Belch and Meatlug. _I'm sure they'll all want to meet you too._

Ah, Berk, Thornado mused. _It's good to be home._

"Just give us time to build special houses, okay?" Hiccup asked. "Toothless can just about fit, but we're going to need to either build a basement or fit an extra storey on top."

Can it be both? Thornado asked. _I'd like a pool._

Ooh, if we're asking, can I have a lightning rod? Blitsif requested.

"Always the same." Hiccup rolled his eyes, grinning from ear to ear. "The world gets turned upside down by dragons, and I'm still cutting wood at the end of it."

We could always hire a Timberjack, Toothless suggested. _I hear they have excellent work rates._

* * *

><p>7.5 additional<p>

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><p>"Well, that's that," Loki said, with a satisfied smile.<p>

His eldest son looked up. "How so?"

"Oh, just checking on the results of a couple of fused loops. Took a lot of energy, but it was entirely worth it." He pointed. "Here, one from your loop with a certain Anchor who got his start with your lot. Here, three of mine to Pern. And here, one of your lupine brother's Anchors and that place which Hel dotes on."

Sleipnir nodded. "I understand the last two. But the other one?"

Loki winked. "Give me a few secrets."

"What about Jorm? Are you involving him in this?"

"Oh..." Loki shrugged. "I had certain plans. Well, his code is usually involved with Pern anyway... but, anyway, I made him known to a certain research project, project 3325."

"...I have no idea what that's supposed to imply, Dad," Sleipnir informed him. "As usual."

The door banged open, and Jormugandr slithered in. "DAD!"

"But I'm about to," Sleipnir added, more positively.

"Why did you give that lot my rÃ©sumÃ©?" Jormugandr asked, pleadingly. "You know as well as I do that the 'Jormugandr solution' is just assigning me to fix all the chaos caused by time travel until I work out a code fix pattern!"

Loki smirked. "Well, you did say you were bored."

"Once! Fifteen hundred iterations ago!" Jormugandr brought his tail around, and nibbled on it nervously. "Rrrgh... I'm going to be fixing anomalies until I eat myself, I swear."

"...nope, still no idea of the specifics," Sleipnir announced.

Loki clapped him on a shoulder. "Learning's half the fun."

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><p>AN:<p>

7.1: This just kept growing, I swear. Partly to explore Stoic, Thornado and Blitsif, partly to explore Pern as a place with loopers. (Canth emits medically unsafe levels of smug.)

>7.2: Meanwhile On Berk 1: Imperial standard-issue flashlights!

7.3: Meanwhile On Berk 2: Yo Dragon.

>7.4: Meanwhile On Berk 3: It's the little things which make it all worthwhile. Like the expression on Drago's face.

7.5: Triumphal Return. (Additional: all very secretive. But now you know why Stoic has two.)

8. Chapter 8

Caution: these contain spoilers for the second film. And are mostly on Pern.

Note: There are a fair few non-HTTYD loops in this set. This fic will now contain some loops from other dragon-centric settings at times. (Not Spyro, though, that's got its own set.)

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><p>8.1<p>

* * *

><p>"Hiccup," Stoic asked, slowly. "What in Niflheim are we?"<p>

Hiccup looked down at himself. "Oh, huh. Wonder where we are... just

gotta wait for those loop memories to kick in. Now, are-"

The coldest air in the world blasted them, ruffling their feathers.

Morning! Toothless announced, landing gracefully between father and son, and giving an 'I've-got-lots-of-teeth-but-I'm-hiding-them-to-be-polite' grin. Behind him, Blitsif settled to the grass.

"Oh, morning Blitz," Stoic added, nodding his beaked head to her. "Where's Thor?"

Fishing, Blitsif told them. _He Woke up a bit hungry, so it'll probably rain fried cod in a few minutes._

Hiccup grinned, which was quite a feat with a beak. "Cool. Well, may as well not waste it â€" Toothless, you still remember how to catch stuff with your wings?"

That's hatchling stuff. Toothless spread his black wings to their full expansion, covering as much surface area as possible. _Week's worth of cat food, coming up._

"We're only _half_ cat," Hiccup pointed out, pedantically. "Half... I think either eagle or osprey, which more or less means the same thing diet-wise, it's true..."

"Which is called _what?_" Stoic stressed.

Thornado materialized on cue overhead, and let off a _boom_. It duly rained fried fish.

Cool, fast food, Toothless broadcast, then rolled his eyes at Blitsif's confusion. _We need to get you a nuclear-age loop soon, half my jokes go over your head._

Just be glad I know what an idiom is, Blitsif replied, grinning.

"Oh, right, sorry." Hiccup shook his head, inspecting his wings absently. "We're griffins, that's what."

Loop memories settled.

"Pretty much the same Berk as usual, except we've already done the reconcile-with-dragons thing..." he continued, with the air of a seasoned traveller â€" which he was. "Ooh, and we're nominally part of a larger empire, but in practise all that means is that we have to provide about six of us maximum on request as military service."

He shrugged, and started collecting the fish off Toothless' wings. "I think they're scared of us. And â€" oh, wait. Yes! Jackpot!"

Stoic blinked at Hiccup's sudden whoop. "What?"

"Oh, I was just wondering if I knew this place â€" and I do." Finishing the job with the fish, he padded back over to his father and laid a wing against his side. (It took some doing â€" Stoic was a _big_ griffin, and his son was a _small_ one.) "I've got friends

here. You'll like 'em."

"Right." Stoic frowned. "I think."

* * *

><p>Gilda the Griffin rolled around on her back on a cloud, mildly bored.<p>

New loops were interesting, generally, but it depended who was there and what they were doing. And until she got contacted by someone who'd know for sure â€" like Dash or Spike â€" all she could do was check Element mixes and guess.

There was a good spread, at least, this time. Hopefully, a few of the non-element users would be there as well, and she'd be able to try a thing she'd wanted to for a while â€" swapping places with Luna at Nightmare Night, pretend it was a _really good_ costume, and muck around with raising the moon and stuff.

Something was nagging her, though. What _was_ it? Something to do with the Empire...

Cudgeling her unresponsive brain, Gilda decided to start from the top.

The Gryphon Lands. A large, complex mix of direct dependencies, vassals, client states, and aligned tribes-

Point one. Normally the Empire was more centralized. Interesting.

-spread over a few small landmasses, none of them more than fifty leagues on a side, and dozens upon dozens of minor archipelagos-

Point two. No great plains, no mountaintop eyries... sounded like the griffins were a lot more sea-oriented this loop, and a quick check revealed her bird part to be osprey and her cat part to be almost lynx-like.

A further quick check reassured her she could still do the ink magic thing with her tail. Losing _that_ would have been inconvenient. Anyway, where was she...

-and she had been sent over on a trading mission, since Princess Celestia had been interested in securing the services of a number of dragons-

...bwah?

* * *

><p>8.2<p>

* * *

><p>This is undignified, Blitsif muttered.

"Eh, lighten up, lass," Stoic replied, getting another basket of

trout. "It's a good way to transport 'em."

It'll get my spines all slimy. Blitsif shuddered involuntarily, as Stoic cheerfully speared more fish on her metallic spines.

"Well, if you're that bothered, I'll make sure to clean you myself afterwards." He placed a final mackerel on each of her tail spikes, and clapped his hands together. "Job done."

I don't know...

"And you get a sanding down, too," Stoic added.

Well... all right, then. Blitsif raised her head. _Okay, we may as well do this._

Stoic nodded, and raised Mjolnir. Lightning speared out of the sky.

Then he plucked a little flesh off the nearest fish, and nibbled it.

"Could use a little lemon, but I think that's done to perfection. Right, let's go."

Blitsif obediently spread her wings, waddled forwards as Stoic clipped himself to her saddle, then launched herself off the cliff into an updraught.

I miss Thornado, she said, meditatively, as they gained height. _It's a pity we don't always loop together._

"I'll tell him you said that," Stoic promised. "And yes, I'll be glad when we're all together again." A thought struck him. "Have you two ever looped together without me?"

Once or twice. Blitsif sent a mental chuckle. _I think we got you to believe you were Thor himself last time â€" every time you swung your hammer, I blasted what it hit and Thornado added the sound effects._

Stoic chuckled as well. "I'm sure you enjoyed yourselves. Okay... you have the image?"

Yes, Blitsif replied, and then they blinked out.

* * *

><p>Here's the deal, Blitsif explained patiently to the Stormcutter. _We've bribed our way this far with fish. Let us past â€" we've no quarrel with your partner â€" and you get half the rest._

Cloudjumper cocked his head, sniffed, and licked one of the fish slices.

Yeah, yeah, Blitsif sighed, transmitting a small pulse of electricity to that spine and giving him a stinging shock. _Make your mind up._

The four-winged dragon looked back and up, at the many dragons enthusiastically licking their lips. Then back down at Stoic, who waved.

He nodded, briskly.

"Excellent," Stoic said, holding out a hand for Cloudjumper to shake.

He did not do so.

After some confusion, and a demonstration between Blitsif and Stoic, he grasped the concept (and Stoic's hand) and duly shook.

Then started in on his bribe.

* * *

><p>"Honey, I'm home!" Stoic called.<p>

Valka sat up, reaching for her spear automatically, then stopped â€" trying to work out what was going on.

Thanks to some silent prep work by Hiccup and Toothless earlier that night, the cave had coat pegs and harness pegs sized for Stoic and his dragon. They walked in like they'd known it all their lives, hung up their respective accoutrements, and Stoic turned to his wife.

"No luck finding any dragon trappers tonight," he said in apologetic tones. "We'll see if Hiccup and Toothless have any better luck â€" if they're not off with their girlfriends, anyway."

Blitsif carefully shed the last of the fish slices into a pot, tipped in bread and cheese, and heated it to piping hot with a quick blast of lightning.

"Ah, thanks, Blitz." Stoic scratched her under the chin, and poured some of the mix onto a plate for her. "Go on, you've earned it tonight."

The Skrill did a happy dance, and began eagerly chewing on the cheese-fish-fondue-thing.

Valka watched, silent, trying to get some kind of mental grip on the situation.

"...who's Toothless?" she finally asked.

At that point, right on cue, Hiccup came around the bend.

"No luck, sorry," he called. "And before you ask, no, I was not lying in a meadow with Astrid all day."

Toothless honked something. Behind him, Cloudjumper contemplated just how much fish a Stormcutter could eat.

"I was exactly correct, Toothless," Hiccup added, turning to his dragon, and backing into the room as Toothless advanced. "We didn't."

Another honk. Toothless tapped something on his side with a paw, and his harness fell apart with a slither of leather and clank of buckles. He stepped over it, gesticulating, and his tail deposited it neatly next to Blitsif's harness.

"Well, yes, we did sit by a lake in a forest all day, but that's, that's not a meadow!" Hiccup shook his head. "And I resent your insinuations."

Toothless folded his paws, sitting back on his tail and hind legs.

There was a clatter outside.

"Hi, everyone!" Astrid called. "Sorry, Mrs. Haddock, I think your Stormcutter is fished out."

Cloudjumper made a deeply satisfied noise, followed by a snore.

Stormfly shook her spines, rolling her eyes.

"Well, yes, dear, he is a bit of a pig, but it's not polite to say it." Astrid undid Stormfly's harness, and put it on the last free peg. "Hey, babe," she added. "Find anything?"

Toothless honked.

"This traitor, this perfidious betrayer," Hiccup replied, pointing at Toothless (who looked smug), gave the whole game away!"

"Aw, really?" Astrid shook her head. "Come on, Toothless, we had a deal!"

Valka almost audibly decided that she'd think about this in the morning, and pulled the blankets back over her head.

* * *

><p>8.3 (Pern)<p>

* * *

><p>Robinton closed his eyes for a moment, remembering.<p>

Remembering his dead wife, Kaisa, who he only rarely had the chance to love into her old age.

Remembering Zair, his faithful bronze, whether dragon or fire-lizard.

And remembering Menolly and Sebell, the children he had never borne.

He had many regrets. As Pern's foremost Masterharper, he had learned to hide them, and to put on a brave "even laughing" face.

And as a looper, he had learned something both cruel and kind. Triage.

If he Awoke early enough, he could prevent his estrangement from his father " or he could save Kaisa " or he could become R'ton, bronze rider, and prepare Pern for the coming ninth pass " or he could prevent the death of F'lon, his oldest friend... the list went on and on.

And, every time, he could only choose a few at most. Other opportunities contracted and vanished as his changes to Pern rippled down, like the change in a song's melody which made it entirely different in truth, though the same in every detail.

And this time, I have made my choice.

Silvina gasped next to him.

Right.

Robinton turned to her. "Silvina " are you alright?"

"I " Robinton," she said, eyes shining. "I think it's time."

My son is on the way.

Robinton took a breath, then stood, and shouted for a healer.

* * *

><p>"She's doing fine," the healer assured. "Just a little-"<p>

Robinton shook his head. "The cord. Where's the cord?"

Seeing the healer's confused expression, he tapped the man's hands. "Find it, man!"

"Sir " Masterharper-" the healer shook his head, hands getting back to work. "I know this is frightening for a new father, but-"

He paused. His deft hands checked again.

"What is it, Rob?" Silvina asked, hands clenched with pain.

"Shards and shells," the healer whispered. "Someone get me some more hot water and numbweed! Sir, you're right " the cord is slipping around his neck. I think I can stop it, though."

"Please," Robinton implored him, tears starting in his eyes. "Do whatever you can."

"I'll do that," the healer promised. "Someone get Master Oldive, I think this needs his abilities."

Robinton knelt by Silvina's side, clutching her hand.

I've done all I can. Now, please " let it not have been in vain.

* * *

><p>Some hours later, tired but triumphant, he cradled his new son.<p>

"Camo," he said, repeating the same name the boy had always born. And savouring the bright, alert look in his eyes. "His name is Camo. And-" his voice broke. "And may he always be as fortunate as today."

"A noble sentiment," Master Oldive agreed, straightening with the aid of his assistant. "How did you know so soon?"

"I didn't," Robinton replied, carefully giving Camo back to Silvina. "But â€" I'd had nightmares. Shameful, horrible nightmares â€" and, well..." He gestured wordlessly at the small bundle. "If such as this can come of a nightmare, then..."

"The saving grace of a nightmare is that it leaves on waking," Shonagar said.

"Ah, Shonagar," Robinton smiled, raising a hand to him. "Your gift with tongues is not limited to training those of others, I see!"

He shook his head, still beaming, and inside him his heart sang.

Sometimes, fate gives back what it once has taken.

* * *

><p>8.4<p>

* * *

><p>Stooooormfly? Toothless asked, in a wheedling voice.

Stormfly raised her head from the grass, and blinked sleep out of her eyes. _What?_

I'm bored.

I was asleep, Toothless. Shove off.

But you're awake now. Toothless honked, and rolled his shoulders. _Why do we have to wait so flippin' long this loop before we do anything?_

Because our Riders are convincing Berk that the dragons are on strike. You know that. Stormfly put her head back on the grass. _Now, kindly-_

Alright, alright. Sheesh. Toothless trapised off.

* * *

><p>Stormfly found it impossible to get back to sleep, and walked over to the small stream in their meadow.<p>

There, she briefly amused herself shooting salmon with spines, before losing interest and just eating them.

Full, she cast around for Toothless. If the hel-spawned Night Fury, demonic terror of the thunder-lit night skies, _had_ to wake her up, he might as well entertain her.

* * *

><p>You hypocrite, Stormfly said flatly.

Shush, I'm trying to get to sleep, Toothless replied, lying down on a just-burned semicircle of loam. _I need my beauty sleep, I had to catch a falling spaceship last loop._

He sighed, snuggling a little tighter to his own tail. _I had it, too, until that skyscraper got in the way._

Stormfly made a rumble of disgust. Then she padded around behind the Night Fury, selected a spot on his forehead, and pressed it with one of her spines.

Hey! Toothless said, as his back ridges snapped up in sequence. _No fair, you know how much that tickles._

I certainly do, Stormfly replied. _Now, where else can I pick..._

Her tail slowly moved to tap another point on Toothless' back.

Gerrof! Toothless flared his wings, and stood back upright. _You know _that_ bit's ticklish as well!_

I know every bit that's ticklish, and don't you forget it, Stormfly replied, scratching her chin with her tail.

Not fair, anyway, the Fury muttered. _You complained when I did it to you._

I complained because you woke me up, Stormfly corrected. Her teeth bared in a grin. _And you hadn't gotten off to sleep in the first place. As they say, fair game._

Her tail slid from side to side, then stopped abruptly.

Toothless held up a paw. _Now, don't do anything-_

The Nadder pounced, landing on Toothless at high speed and rolling the both of them over and over.

Gotcha! She broadcast, which turned into a yelp as Toothless tapped her on the side. _Hey, that was-_

Turnabout is fairplay, spinetail, Toothless reminded her, scrabbling out from under while she was distracted. _And I know all _your_ tickish points as well._

Then it's a duel, Stormfly said, mock-seriously. _Winner presents the loser with four fish and one afternoon in the best sunny spot._

Fine by me.

Both crouched, eyes fixed on a particularly choice target on the other dragon. Then, as if at a signal, both leapt.

* * *

><p>"Flippin' dragons..." Hiccup muttered, trying not to giggle as he raised the film camera.<p>

He kept feeling phantom tickles from Stormfly, and Astrid's expression said something similar was happening to her, but neither of them _wanted_ to giggle right now.

The view before them was too precious to spoil by letting the dragons know they were there.

* * *

><p>8.5<p>

* * *

><p>"...ggrrrrAAAh!" Snotlout threw his helmet against the wall, producing a ping noise.

Hookfang's head came up. _What is it?_

"...oh, _Dad_." Snotlout sighed, sitting down on the bed. "You know how he gets."

Is this the thing where he keeps pushing us to do as well as we possibly can? Hookfang quirked his head. _He is interested in your doing well. Is that not a good thing?_

"Yeah! And... at the same time, no." Snotlout rubbed the bridge of his nose, then flopped back onto the furs. "I mean... I'm glad he _is_, and I do love him, but... the fact I have to say that kinda says it all."

Hookfang considered that.

"Some days, I just wish he'd leave me alone, you know?" Snotlout asked, and drew his sword. A _spatha_ he'd taken to practising with some time ago, it shone in the window-light as he juggled it with sure hands. "It kinda feels like - he loves me, but _how much_ depends on how we do at Thawfest, yeah?"

I am afraid I do not, not really. Maybe that is because I love you so.

The blade sank into the ceiling, and Snotlout smiled - pleased both at the comment and at his own skill - before his expression faded back to distaste. "I sort of wish he was a bit more like Hiccup's dad. Well, not like he is at the start of baseline, but certainly like he gets later on - or how he is now."

Hookfang shook his wings out. _But he respects your skill as a Viking, as well as a dragon rider._

"Yeah, but..." Snotlout shrugged, and caught the blade as it fell from the ceiling. "It gets kind of stressful, especially every time."

The Nightmare didn't say anything for a few moments, then blinked. _I have an idea!_

"Really?" Snotlout looked interested. "Let's hear it."

If it bothers you, simply do not go. These are supposed to be fun.

"...yeah, don't think that's going to work," the youth muttered. "Dad would nag me for the rest of the loop."

Really? Hookfang frowned, then brightened. _Would it please your father if you returned with some loot instead?_

Snotlout blinked. "Go on."

* * *

><p>"...okay, I'm going to love hearing the explanation for this one," Hiccup said, rolling his eyes. "You're _sure_ these are the coordinates Hookfang gave?"

Checked twice. Toothless shrugged. _No mistake on my end._

Hiccup contemplated the image. No mistake, that was definitely the Hagia Sophia. "Okay, we may as well go find out what the hel."

On it, Toothless replied. _We go._

Blackness.

* * *

><p>"...so, anyway, I guess I'm the Roman Emperor now," Snotlout finished, lounging on the throne. "Not sure I follow it myself."<p>

Hookfang made a pleased noise, reclining on hypocaust-heated stone. _Told you you would enjoy a holiday._

Hiccup blinked. "You've only been gone a week..."

* * *

><p>8.1 continued<p>

* * *

><p>I like this new setup, Toothless commented, as they skimmed low over the waves. _Much easier on my back._

Hiccup trimmed his feathers, lashed his tail briefly to one side to steer, and drew up on Toothless' wing. "Yeah, but you'd better be there when I get tired. Unlike you, I can't keep this up all day."

You know it. Toothless raised his head slightly to check on his own harness. _Yep, still on. Land there whenever you want. Payment is one fish per hour._

"Suits me."

A little higher and further back, the rest of the dragons and riders followed in a large V formation.

The twins led, their huge dragon providing the air flow that set up the others for long distance flight. On the left arm of the V, Hookfang and his rider led Meatlug and hers, with Gobber trailing (and carrying his Terror, who was making the best of the situation by napping.)

On the right arm, Blitsif and Stormfly composed the main part of the formation. Thornado was trailing, largely to keep an eye on Stoic "the member of their formation _least_ used to long distance flight."

I thought Hiccup said he knew this place, Stoic grumbled to Blitsif and Thornado. _Why do we have to go the long way?_

The message went from them to Toothless to Hiccup.

"Well..." Hiccup executed a roll in mid-air. "Basically, it's been a while, and I don't want to end up... like, fifty feet underground, or back in time, or something. When a loop you think you know is this changed, you want to _really_ use fresh coordinates."

The answer was duly sent back from griffin to dragon to dragon to griffin.

I'm sure, Stoic sent to be relayed back. Then: _How long is this going to take?_

Well, if you're going to grumble... Blitsif replied directly. _Hey, loudmouth, close up. Stoic and I are going the quick way._

She shed velocity, dropped low a bit, and then came up under Stoic so he ended up on her back. With a surprised squawk (that he later denied had happened), Stoic found himself rising abruptly away from the formation.

His feathers stood on end, as Blitsif began to trickle-charge from static electricity. _Now, get that hammer of yours out. You're going by Blitsif!_

Stoic nodded, understanding, and readied Mjolnir. Two quick spins, and it charged to the point it could achieve a lightning bolt.

Ready? Stoic asked.

...now! Blitsif told him.

The bolt of blue-arc'd lightning struck one of her spines, arc'd to the rest, and then enveloped them in a curtain of light.

Then they _went._

* * *

><p>"...huh," Hiccup said, watching as the dragon and griffin shot off at about the speed of sound. "Not bad."<p>

He glanced over at Toothless. "No, it's not a challenge."

Sez you. Toothless contemplated for a moment. _Alright, I'll be good._

* * *

><p>Princess Celestia landed in front of the best tea shop in Horseshoe Bay, ready to greet the envoys from the Griffin Empire.<p>

Well, actually, she was several hours early. But she'd learned, even before the loops began, that turning up early was a perfect excuse for a cuppa and a slice of cake.

"Lieutenant," she said to her duty guard commander, "Please try to avoid crowding other ponies in the shop."

"Of course," he replied, and turned. "Guard duty to form external perimeter."

* * *

><p>Ten minutes into a really very good cup of Earl Bay (the local speciality), Celestia's elevenes was interrupted by a loud BANG.<p>

"What was that?" she asked, putting her teacup down. Then, as nopony appeared to know offhand, headed outside to find out for herself.

* * *

><p>"That" turned out to be a dragon and a griffin sprawled over the main square.<p>

The dragon was moderately sized â€" to her, it looked about Adult or Mature Adult, possibly smaller â€" and festooned with the most remarkable array of spikes, some of which still sparked with residual electricity.

The griffin was a large specimen of the species, and slightly... off, to her. It matched loop memories, but wasn't quite up to code with her wider experience of griffins such as Gilda.

Also, his every feather and every hair of his fur were standing on end. An occasional spark blazed from it to the hammer held in his foreclaws.

"Next time, Blitsif," he muttered, "We try that when I don't have fur or feathers."

Celestia nodded to herself. "I presume you are a newcomer to Equestria?" she asked. "I am Awake, if that helps, and I presume you are as well."

The griffin shook his head, instinctually tried to soothe ruffled feathers, then gave it up and looked at her. He blinked.

"Huh. An' I thought griffins were weird," he said, absently.

The dragon scrambled to its feet, and gave Celestia a long, careful look over. Then turned to survey the rest of the town.

"Oh, right." The griffin palmed his hammer, which vanished. "You're a looper, right?"

"Indeed," Celestia replied. "And your employer for the nonce, if I have this right. You are of the Hairy Hooligans, of Berk?" She made the connection. "Does that mean Hiccup is-"

Cold air blasted the town.

"Thanks for the coordinates, Blitsif!" a voice shouted from overhead. Hiccup sprang from Toothless' back, came gliding down to a landing beside the larger griffin, and watched as the rest of the Berk dragons landed in the remainder of the main square.

"Afternoon, Princess Celestia," Hiccup added. "Several dragons and Vikings, reporting as requested. I see you've met my father."

"Wonderful," Celestia replied, both for their presence and for the fact of new Loopers for Berk. "I'm afraid my schedule is rather busy, but allow me to inform you of what I require of you." To be precise, what her pre-awakening plans had been "extra guards for Twilight. "And " I look forward to meeting you, as I am sure do many others here, ponies and otherwise."

Hiccup nodded. "Sounds good."

* * *

><p>8.6 (Pern)<p>

* * *

><p>The first time Robinton had 'looped', he had not even known what was happening.<p>

One minute, he had been peacefully sinking into his seat, the last message of AIVAS burning on the monitor "and a time for every purpose under heaven" and his faithful Zair wrapped around his neck...

And the next, he was walking up the road towards Ruatha Hold, dressed as a drudge.

Confused, he had taken stock, and discovered himself "undeniably younger. Not vigorous, perhaps, but still in relatively robust middle age.

No Zair, had been the next thing he noticed. No Zair... the absence of that comforting presence was like a shock of cold water, and it had taken him a moment to get over it.

The heights were still cloaked with green.

The hold was run down, not prosperous â€" not at all as Jaxom and Lytol had left it-

And then, in a rush, it had hit him.

This was the long interval. Well before Thread returned. Jaxom was a child yet to be born, Lytol a dragonless man at the Weaver hall.

He was Masterharper, yes, but newly thus â€" relatively, anyway.

And Fax still lived. This was the time he had infiltrated the hold, to discover what could be done to deal with the self-styled lord of seven holds.

Pern's only conqueror, and murderer of his best friend.

After taking a minute or two to compose himself, Robinton decided â€" if he was in the past, all he could do was what he had done. Maybe correct a mistake or two, as well â€" find Menolly earlier, save her from Half-Circle.

Attend the funeral of his dear father.

Pressure Piemur to report what happened to him...

There was so much to be done.

* * *

><p>In the end, he felt he had made some difference â€" though, strangely, it was dwarfed by what F'lar did. Already, the Benden rider's achievements had been truly spectacular, but the formidable man he remembered was eclipsed by this paragon he bore somewhat awed witness to.<p>

AIVAS was uncovered fully five years early, and he had obtained Zair on time â€" somehow juggling events successfully that his children-in-all-but-name had all done their parts... though Camo's earnest, dim attempts to help everyone he could as much as he could understand made him uncomfortable, even so.

And then, he had eventually fallen asleep before AIVAS, in the same room. The same message burning on the monitor, as the intelligent computer gave up its life for the sake of Pern's independence. And the same slow heartbeat around his neck, as Zair sat silent sentry on his shoulders.

Somehow, it was only then that he realized â€" his bronze would not outlive him. Zair died with him, as faithful as any dragon, following where his beloved went.

And yet... and yet.

* * *

><p>This time, he appeared early in the Ninth Pass itself. At the debate over what to do, now that Thread had truly

returned.<p>

Again, he did what he felt should be done, championing the cause of Benden with all his considerable skill. Pushing past the ache that, it seemed, losing Zair would forever bring, he got all the Lords bar a few on side... and then, as the meeting broke up, asked F'lar for a word.

He wanted to know if people could 'time it' as dragons could.

To his astonishment, F'lar embraced him warmly, and gave him a warm welcome to what he called 'the loops'. Too startled to ask many questions, Robinton found himself hustled to Mnementh, taken Between to Benden, and then introduced anew to Lessa " who already knew him.

She, it seemed, as her husband and their dragons, were old hands at this. They expressed heartfelt regrets that none of the 'others' were present and accounted for, but assured him that " he had but to do what he could, and they would do the rest.

And that, so long as Pern was familiar, F'lar would be there to guide him.

* * *

><p>That time, emboldened by understanding what was going on, he pushed harder. Not only did he assemble his family, and aid Pern in stumbling back to what their Ancestors had planned for them, he also found time " and, he admitted, the strength of heart " to spend time with the one son of his body.<p>

Camo was sweet enough, and it was plain to see that, whatever his handicap, he tried. Harder than he had ever noticed the first time, or the second, and certainly harder than Robinton had ever had to try at...

Well, anything. Except, perhaps, enduring the loss of his beloved wife, a pain that Zair's absence sharpened anew.

Spurred on by that thought, he endeavoured to get the boy a fire-lizard of his own. The animal, a brown, enthralled Camo " and, in his more whimsical moments, Robinton imagined that they were actually helping one another understand things. (Certainly Menolly's fair loved them both.)

But, some things " it seemed " were inevitable. Once more, he slipped away in AIVAS' chamber, at the same time as the Artificial Intelligence Voice Address System. The same message on the terminals, and Zair wrapped gently around his neck.

* * *

><p>The fourth time " things changed.<p>

"...both Impress, of course," was the first thing he heard.

Looking aside, he felt a bolt of lightning strike his heart. F'lon " dear F'lon! - sat beside him, leaning forward in his seat to look down on the hatching ground of Benden Weyr.

And " he was young again. A man of thirty to thirty-five years, he thought, though it was hard to tell exactly.

Too late for Kaisa, sadly. But " he could save F'lon. He could prevent Fax ever rising to power!

And " like a blast of cold air, a thought hit him. _And Jaxom?_

F'lon was looking at him, confused. "Robinton?"

"Sorry, F'lon," he apologized, hearing the humming of the dragons intensifying. "I was far away and long ago." Or in the future. "I hope both boys Impress, of course."

F'lon accepted his apology " the Weyrleader knew how much his dead wife still affected him, of course " and returned with him to watching the sands.

With a crack, the first egg broke.

"Mnementh," Robinton whispered, caught up in the moment.

F'lon gave him a puzzled look, which became astonished when F'lar spoke up from the grounds. "He says his name is Mnementh!"

Master Harper, Mnementh's mind whispered to him " confirming his guess, that the young boy below him was also the great weyrleader of the ninth pass in truth.

Another shell broke, revealing the largest brown on the face of Pern. "Canth," he said, recognizing this one as well, and F'lon barely registered his younger son's Impression before realizing Robinton had again predicted a dragon's name before it Impressed.

"Robinton?" F'lon asked, sounding almost reverent. "I'd forgotten " you can hear dragons, can't you?"

In truth, Robinton had almost forgotten himself. Decades without using it had caused the ability to fade, and Ramoth and Mnementh had casually mentioned that they could bespeak anyone " so it had not seemed at all strange.

But now...

Most of the dragons had already paired up by now. There were only three remaining " green, blue, and an unhatched egg " and as Robinton contemplated the fact that he was, in a sense, like Moreta or Lessa... both small dragons found partners.

Then the final shell broke.

I have found you, said a voice almost the twin of his own. _I love you, and I am with you, and will not leave you while we both still live._

Robinton stood, just ahead of the astonished Weyrleader. "Is it-"

I am Zair, dear one.

"...by Faranth's first egg," F'lon breathed next to him. "I didn't know that was possible."

Mnementh tells me that F'lar is confused, Zair added, shaking himself free of the shell remnants. _I am as well, a little. But we can talk later â€" I am afraid I _am _rather hungry._

Robinton reached for the rail, and hoisted himself over it. It was a drop of only a few feet to the hatching ground sands, once he lowered himself, and he met Zair halfway across the sand.

"Oh, you marvellous creature," Robinton whispered, embracing him. "I have missed you so."

Zair wrapped his neck around Robinton's torso. _Nothing, not even time, will keep us apart forever. Because I love you, and because you are my Rider._

* * *

><p>8.7 (Pern)<p>

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><p>A young voice rose over the Hold rim. It sang of joy, remembered and new, and of the pleasure of seeing old friends.<p>

A second voice joined it, a high, wordless descant which swelled into pure, rippling pleasure as the song came into the second verse. Then two more, deeper, brassy counterpoints to the first two.

As the song went on, it touched on novelty. The way that an old home was enhanced by something so simple as a sprig of new growth on a sill, that the things a friend had learned and done while apart gave meaning and spice to life together.

Three more voices joined in, then another three. They wove together in chorus like instruments as much as voices, soaring high over the hold.

And then, one by one, they faded. The last two remaining singers held their notes for five full seconds after their accompaniment left them, then ended together.

"Beautiful," Sebell said, clapping.

Menolly turned, startled. "Sebell â€" sorry, I was-"

"No, don't apologize." The young harper sat down next to his friend. "I was looking for you down in the hall, then I heard you and after that it was easy to find you. Is that your _Ballad of Return and Renewing?_"

"Yes." Menolly nodded, stroking Beauty. "I always find something new to add to it, every time."

"As it should be." He passed her a small box. "Your ointment. I know it's hard to remember whether you got your hand injury, but this time you did."

"Oh, thanks." The apprentice Harper blushed. "You're right, I do keep forgetting." A shadow passed over her face, as she remembered the trouble that long-ago fish-knife had caused her. "At least I learned to play as well with either hand long ago."

"There is that." Sebell smiled up at the rest of the fair. "Do they miss Poll?"

All the time, Beauty informed him, speaking directly to his mind.

I don't, Diver denied. _He takes the best sun spots._

That's because he's smart, Rocky weighed in. _And you love him really._

Well, I miss Kimi more than I miss Poll. Diver huffed slightly.

Showoff. Rocky alighted between Menolly and Sebell. _You know it's going to be his turn to be Menolly's dragon sooner or later._

Menolly laughed out loud.

"Are they squabbling again?" Sebell asked, taking her hand.

"Oh, they're arguing over whether they miss Kimi more than Poll," Menolly explained. "You little monsters! Kimi's going to be along soon, you know. Her and Zair."

Zair, I like, Diver allowed.

Beauty crawled down to Menolly's shoulder, and sat there. _We all like Zair._

"I don't know how you handle them all." Sebell smiled. "Oh, I almost forgot. Robinton asked to remind you to find Camo's brown again."

"Oh, ye of little faith, Sebell," Menolly replied. "I picked up his egg already."

Beauty cuffed her on the ear with a wing, chittering laughter. _I did it, you mean!_ Then she rubbed Menolly's cheek. _But yes, soon Sandy will be back with his human._

Her tone turned melancholy. _Poor Camo. He... well, reminds me of how Mimic, Lazybones and the rest of us still are, compared to Rocky, Diver and I. Not able to think as well._

"Sandy is good for him," Sebell said firmly.

No argument there.

Diver landed on Sebell's arm, after a brief call of warning. _How long before Menolly gets to be a proper Harper again?_

"We only Woke up this afternoon, Diver!" Menolly pointed out. "Give

me a week before you start expecting me to walk the tables!"

We all think very highly of you, Rocky said simply. _What about that song about us? Try playing that at the Gather._ He and Diver exchanged a glance. _We all like that song._

"That's the one where you all get to dance, right?" Sebell hid a smile. "It'll certainly make your mark."

"And make a pretty Mark, too," Menolly agreed. "Tell you what. Get Robinton to do a few turns doing the music, and we can get a chance to dance together."

"Won't that unfairly deprive old Groghe's sons?" Sebell teased.

"There's seventeen of them, Sebell," Menolly replied with a wince. "My feet would be worn down to the knees if I had to give them all honours."

And we dance with all the other fire lizards, Rocky said, shaking his head. _Lazy two-legs._

Beauty glanced over her shoulder at the other six members of the fair â€" Menolly's three browns, two greens and one blue. _Maybe we should head back. I think they're getting bored, hungry or both._

"You're a regular weyrwoman, Beauty," Menolly said, standing with a grunt of effort. "Right, what's tomorrow... oh, yes. Records again."

I've been learning to write! Diver informed her proudly. _Can I help?_

Menolly winced. "...maybe. We'll see how it goes."

* * *

><p>8.8 (Pern)<p>

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><p>"A good morning to you," F'lar said, sitting down on a rock by one of the newly Impressed pairs. "And welcome to Pern."<p>

Mnementh flew over with a large runner-beast, and alighted about half a length away. _My welcome also._

The young rider looked F'lar up and down â€" mostly up. "Well, welcome to you as well. Who are you?"

"The local Anchor," F'lar replied, smiling. "Also Weyrleader, but that's got to wait a good few months yet; Ramoth is barely Impressed."

I can hardly wait. Mnementh chewed on a haunch. _Hm, this is a bit tough. When __is__ Ruatha going to start tithing again?_

F'lar shot Mnementh a look.

"Yes, well." The young man glanced back at his dragon, who was giving what was as close to a bland glare as a bronze could manage. "Actually â€" about Impression. We sort of had a few questions about that."

The bronze weyrling spoke up. "Extremely _important_ questions," he said, in a voice far deeper than it should have been.

"Hm." F'lar tapped his chin for a moment, stood, and glanced up towards the newly occupied Weyrwoman's quarters. When he was done, he turned back to them briskly. "I think I can guess. You two are _not_ partners, in any real meaning of the word, back where you come from."

"Exactly," B'lbo agreed. "And... well, this is all a bit uncomfortable."

"I could tolerate it for one loop," agreed bronze Smaug. "Maybe even a few; I freely concede that you have more to you than I first saw. But forever?" He shook his head, wisps of smoke issuing forth. "Given the loopers we have seen who have been here, forever seems all too likely. And I have no desire to be torn asunder by the death of one Hobbit, or even his absence."

"You'll be glad to hear, oh chieftest and greatest of calamities," B'lbo contributed, "that the feeling is as mutual as your self-image can safely bear."

"I _know_," Smaug muttered. More smoke issued forth. "Which is very strange in itself."

F'lar half-raised a hand. "Careful with the fire magic, please. And â€" well, I do have good news."

"Praise be," B'lbo said, sitting himself.

"First â€" the bond is as permanent as you want it to be." F'lar shook his head, expression darkening. "Or as permanent as you deserve. It's formed and strengthened by love, proximity, and want for it, and weakened by any of time apart, callous acts, or simple lack of want for it."

Mnementh had finished his meal by now. He walked slowly over, lay next to them, and rested his huge head alongside F'lar.

The future Weyrleader scratched Mnementh's eye ridge. "We've had a lot of all the first three, in our time."

B'lbo nodded, his expression clearing. "Well, I _think_ I understand. And, ah, the... suicide?"

The first time, Mnementh informed all of them with quiet solemnity, _I â€" as all dragons â€" would follow my Rider to death because I could never bear to be apart from him._

He snorted, very gently. _Now, I follow him because it brings me back to him straight away._

F'lar smiled.

"_Have_ any of them been broken?" Smaug asked.

"A few. Usually other loopers, who didn't want them to persist." F'lar shrugged. "The bond just unravelled, slowly."

And there is Meron, Mnementh added.

"Who?" B'lbo asked. "I've not heard the... wait, I _do_ recognize it. A lord. Loop memories, I think?"

"You're the only one who'd know," Smaug reminded him.

"No, that is loop memories, most likely â€" he holds Nabol." F'lar's expression turned distant. "I wish F'nor was here â€" he saw it happen â€" but Meron is the reason we know that bonds can _snap_." The last word was punctuated by a click of the fingers, and Mnementh growled.

"He had a fire lizard â€" not a true dragon, one much smaller." F'lar estimated the size with his hands. "He tried to force the poor thing to go to the Red Star â€" the source of Thread."

She ran, and hid, Mnementh continued the story, his mental tone hardening until it was like granite. _And never returned. He died, justly, alone â€" and she did not follow him._ He huffed. _Pern is always better for it._

"You know, I could almost like you," Smaug observed.

"So," F'lar said, briskly. "I hope that puts your mind at rest. If you wanted to try it for a while â€" which I _would_ encourage â€" then it would last as long as you wanted it."

The Ardan loopers frowned, not quite in unison.

"You've heard of unconditional love?" F'lar asked, in apparent non-sequiter. When B'lbo nodded, F'lar shrugged. "No such thing."

I would never stop loving you, F'lar, Mnementh said forcefully.

"Even if I killed Ramoth?" F'lar asked, a smile touching his lips.

You would never do that.

"And if I did, I wouldn't be the one you loved any more," F'lar agreed. "We've had this argument before, Mnementh and I. I don't think either of us has ever really _won_."

"Hmmm." B'lbo's eyes turned skywards, watching a blue dragon take off and wink out. "Well, thank you, then."

"What else does this loop have?" Smaug asked. "Aside from politics, dragons, and this substance called Thread?"

"Music, for one," F'lar informed them. "Piemur and Robinton are both Awake, so there will be plenty of that."

"And food?" B'lbo smiled. "I like the sound of this already. Wine,

victuals, and song, and everyone lives underground. It's almost like home."

* * *

><p>8.9<p>

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><p>"I've always kind of wondered," Gobber mused. "You know. About us. You, specifically."<p>

His Terror gave a sleepy chirp.

"Yes, I know you're sleepy." Gobber sat down. "You're always sleepy."

Not true. With a flap of his wings, the Terror spun upright. _Sometimes I'm drowsy._

"Yeah, whatever." The smith shrugged. "I mean, you know Grump, right?"

Of course.

"Right. Well, I'm kind of wondering... why it was you, who ended up looping with me."

Any regrets? The mental tone was sad, wheedling and pleading all at the same time.

"No, you little tyrant." Gobber snatched him out of the air, and scratched him to within an inch of his life. "It's just confusin', is all."

Really?

"Well, look at Astrid. She's a precise, deadly warrior, she got a precise, deadly dragon. Hiccup â€" his dragon's so like him they have the same birthday!" Gobber absently threw some diced fish into the air, and the Terror wriggled out of his grip to catch them. "Same with Hookfang, the twins, even Stoic now. Their dragons all fit 'em."

I don't see the problem. With a satisfied chirrup, the little dragon bounced two cubes of fish on his nose at once. Then he fried all three with a single whiff of flame. _Do you have a point?_

"The point I was gettin' to, you gluttonous beastie, is that I can't for the life of me work out what about us is the same." Gobber shrugged again. "I mean, apart from anythin' else, you can't even make up your mind on your name!"

Haven't heard a good one yet, he replied. _I'm trying on Lazerdeath the awesome._ The Terror posed for dramatic effect, which failed. _Like it?_

"I'm just gonna go ahead and call you Lazy," Gobber decided.

Awww. The newly nicknamed Lazy slumped, then slouched over to his

bed. Picking up a bit of wire, he heated it with a quick burst of flame and bent it into a semicircle. _Speaking of lazy, though, I'm going to have a nap. Need the furnace lit?_ As he asked, Lazy screwed two bits of wool onto the ends of the semicircle.

"Nah, still lit." Gobber checked the board. "And I've only got three projects today. Make fridge, build power plant, shop for food. Well, may as well get started."

Lazy curled up in bed, his new ear mufflers firmly on his head. _Don't let me slow you down,_ he yawned.

Gobber shook his head. _Wasn't plannin' on it._

* * *

><p>8.10 (Pern)<p>

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><p>Piemur stretched, leaning far back and throwing his arms out to either side. "Ah, it's good to be back in the south!"<p>

"Careful where you say that," Sharra advised him, bringing in some juice. "Or someone'll ask when you could have come down before. Some for you as well, Weyrleader?"

"No, I'm off back," F'lar denied. "Soon, at that. I just wanted to help the young harper here on his great quest. I think he's got everything he'll need."

Piemur saluted, one hand going to his bag. "I think so as well. Thank you - and thank you as well, Mnementh."

My pleasure. The bronze looked out the window at sun-drenched beaches. _It's a pity we cannot stay yet. Keep us updated._

"Will do â€" at least, when Farli finally bothers to hatch." Piemur caressed his bag again, consciously this time.

"You're sure that's the right egg?" Sharra asked, then shook her head. "Sorry, stupid question. Of course it is."

"Always is," Piemur confirmed. "Even a year early, like now."

Sharra looked slightly distant. Then chuckled, rolling her eyes.

"Ruth," she explained to the others. "Jaxom's not Awake, but _he_ is, and he's been keeping me updated on how he's interfering with Dorse."

Piemur laughed. "What was it this time?"

"Every time Dorse says something hurtful, another fire lizard flicks in to watch him." Sharra chuckled again, as Ruth sent her a mental image. "The boy's being orbited by over four dozen now."

"Poetry in motion," Piemur agreed. "Oh - keep an eye out for Stupid, will you?"

"I will," Sharra agreed. "I know where to find him if everything goes as normal, and I'll send Meer to let you know."

"Thanks." Piemur steadied his bag. "Right," he said, with an air of satisfaction. "It's eighty thousand miles to South Hold, I've got a full bag of maps, half a month until Farli hatches, it's hot, and I'm wearing harper blue."

F'lar blinked. "Pardon?"

Piemur deflated slightly. "Did none of you get the reference?"

"'fraid not. And... you're in South Hold," Sharra added. "I know what you're planning to do, but wouldn't it make more sense to say it's... however far it is... around the Southern Continent?"

The young harper-spy deflated further. "Yes, it would, but it wouldn't fit the joke. Oh, forget it..."

"You'd better get going," F'lar informed him gravely. "It's a long way to walk if you want to circumnavigate Pern on foot."

See you later, Mnementh said. Just don't expect any Benden dragons to help you cheat.

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><p>8.11 (Deraine, Sagene and Roche)<p>

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><p>"You know," Hal said, standing in a muddy field. "Sometimes, I hate this crap."<p>

"What was that?" one of the handlers asked.

"Nothing. As you were." Hal turned for his quarters. "Bugged if I'm going flying in that."

One of the things you didn't really appreciate until you'd been to a nuclear-tech world was weather forecasts. Around here, in Sagene, it was pretty much going by the feelings of the local weather witch - and hoping she wasn't just hung over, or something.

* * *

><p>The next morning dawned bright and clear.<p>

Word from the top was that Hal's flight would be needed to fly cover over a new offensive - one intended to get into the Roche lines, and swing right to pin them against a major river.

Like that ever worked. Hal had read a lot about strategy in his time, and one inescapable conclusion he'd come to was that the hub's World War One had nothing on how hard a decisive victory was in this bloody, sodden, muddy mess of a war.

But - he was damned if he was ever going to let that stop him. Maybe,

if he worked out a way of doing it all right, he could end the war quickly. And do it every time, or at least often enough that he and Storm - and maybe his wife, assuming he felt like trusting her - could fly west, to a world far from the violence, without feeling like he was abandoning everyone.

"But what do I know," he asked Storm, going over every inch of the handlers' saddle-work. "Maybe it's all been running away. Every last mile of it."

The dragon made a groonk noise, and snaked his head down to bump roughly against Hal's side.

"Yeah, I know I'm a cynical bastard." Hal smiled, and tugged again on a strap. "Damn, that's loose. Hold still."

The dragon-handlers watched in some awe as Storm, the great green beast of the lauded Dragonmaster, obediently froze to let the human work on him.

"Right, that's as good as I can be bothered with," Hal pronounced, after a minute or so. "Bend down, would you."

Storm lowered his neck, crouching almost to the wet grass, and Hal mounted the carapace with a huff of effort.

"Right, where's Farren... no, sod that. Up, Storm!"

Turf and mud went flying as Storm lumbered into a run, scattering the handlers, and took off with great sweeps of his wings.

* * *

><p>"Well, I've decided what I'm doing this time, Storm," Hal said into the air.<p>

Storm made a curious rumble.

Hal's reply was first a grin like that of a shark. Then, a low metallic click noise.

"I've heard of this thing being called the greatest battle implement ever designed," he mused. "Bit overblown, but I can see where he was coming from. Okay, if I were Ky Yasin's dragons, where would I be..."

* * *

><p>Hal was aware that he was a little more... ruthless than other loopers. Certainly than most other Anchors, who tended to either tell him to lighten up or react with horror.

Hal was also aware that some of them had a point. He was a cold bastard, he did focus himself quite uncompromisingly on war, and he had been diagnosed with acute battle fatigue in the past.

But, then, as far as he was concerned, it was a little easier to be merciful when the entire middle of your life wasn't a continent-spanning war.

"Steady," he told Storm, unnecessarily, looking around to be sure the trio of dragons he could see were everything in eyesight. No cloud in sight, and he was in the sun... and nothing above him. "Okay, dive."

He gigged Storm's flanks with his stirrups, and the green dragon slanted down into a dive.

* * *

><p>As they'd rehearsed, Storm held his tongue until they were almost on the "Vic" of dragons. Then he roared challenge, and Hal slotted in his clip.<p>

The V formation broke up, the leader going for height while his two wingmen turned inwards to try and foul Storm's flight path. The big green slowed, avoiding their grasping claws and the horns of the black dragon on the left, and Hal fired.

With a blam, a .30-06 bullet dropped the rider of the lead dragon instantly. His black snarled, and the next bullet went wide, then a third one took it in the throat.

For a moment, there was pure shock on the part of the two wingmen. Hal hadn't counted on the shock, having a plan if they reacted on instinct " but now that it happened, he used it ruthlessly. Four more bullets blasted out, killing the red dragon and his rider, then Hal swore as the Garand's final shot went wide and the clip pinged off Storm's carapace.

There was still one black dragon and its rider left, and the Roche rider fumbled for his crossbow as the dragon lunged. Hal bared his teeth, reaching for a new clip-

And Storm roared, and spat flame. A great, rushing gout of it, that set the last rider's clothes on fire and knocked him off his seat to plummet to the ground a thousand feet below, and left the black yelping with pain and flying frantically for safety. Trying to escape this impossible fire-breathing monster.

Hal sighed, as he finally slotted the new clip in. "I had that."

Storm wagged his wings, gliding for a moment, before starting on the steady climb that would take them back to altitude.

His rider frowned with distaste. He didn't like killing dragons, exactly " not even riders " but... he'd do whatever it took.

And it would be all worth it, if he could end this senseless bloody war even a month sooner.

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><p>8.12 (Alagaesia)<p>

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><p>Saphira spread her wings, still tiny, and crooned. Hello again, Eragon.

"And hello to you as well, Blue Scales," Eragon replied, smiling. He hauled a wrapped parcel of meat out of his pocket. "Right, this was frozen, so it's still good... go ahead."

Can't you feed me? Saphira asked, wheedling. _You do need to formally bond with me this time._

"Ah, you're just feeling needy, aren't you?" the human asked, taking out a strip of well-worn leather and stropping his knife against it. After a few passes, he touched it to his thumb. "Looks good enough... v_erma, stÃ;l._"

The knife began to glow a dull red, and he used it to carve off chips of the frozen venison. "But really, you should hunt for yourself more often. It's not as if you'd be in any danger."

Yes, yes. Saphira inspected the fragments of her shell. _But I still like it when you do it for me. It's nice._

"Women," Eragon muttered, and gave a theatrical sigh. "You bond with them, cast magic for them, fight alongside them and even trim their nails, and still they want more."

Anyone would think they wanted some kind of compensation, Saphira agreed. _For the little things they do, like breathe fire on people you don't like very much. Ooh, this one's nice. It's nearly circular._

"Oh?" Eragon looked over. "Oh, yeah. That _is_ nice. Should I make an ornament out of it?"

Could you? Saphira's tail lashed happily. _It'd be nice to have something new._

"Okay, okay, I get the hint. I'll see about getting you a caparison or something." Eragon finished carving off the meat, and brought it over. Then he picked out just one piece, and put it on his hand.

Well? Saphira asked, looking up at him. _Go on, then._

He offered it to her, putting it just below her tiny head.

"We are together," he said, formally.

And let none take us apart. Saphira delicately plucked up the tidbit, swallowed it, and then laid her head on his hand â€" producing the patch of lightened skin that marked a Rider.

Then, that done, Saphira began begging for more food.

Eragon passed her another bit, grinning. "So, what should we do this time? Double secret order of dragon ninjas? Fighting style consisting of nothing but picking people up and dropping them, one by one? Declare pacifism?"

Actually, I did have this idea... Saphira began. _Most of the work would be yours, I'm afraid, because I'm way too small for it... you do know Oerth magic, right?_

"Yes..." Eragon allowed, supplying more meat.

Right. Well, first off, find those Ra'zac, and... I dunno, do something to them. Saphira shrugged, still eating. _Be creative. Then, go to that cave..._

* * *

><p>"What's this, Eragon?" Roran asked, inspecting the stall. "Thought you were a hunter. Got into jewellery all of a sudden?"<p>

"Yep," Eragon replied. "Found a whole bunch of 'em. Took me most of the day to carry 'em all back, so I'm a bit short on food, and I kept one for myself â€" no need for more than one. Want one?"

Roran inspected a large, green rock. It was silky smooth, and about the size to comfortably fit in his palm â€" like most of the rest of them. "They do look pretty... how much were you asking?"

"Name the price," Eragon told him. "It isn't as if I'm making a loss, now, is it?"

* * *

><p>The next morning, Eragon was woken bright and early by Brom.<p>

"What were you doing, boy?" the old storyteller asked, without preamble. "Do you have any idea what you've done?"

"Oh, you weren't there for it?" Eragon asked. (Of course, he knew the answer â€" he'd picked a day Brom was out of town.) "Do you want one? There's at least a dozen or so I didn't sell..."

"That is nothing whatsoever to do with it." Brom walked in a small circle. "Eragon... those weren't just stones. They were... okay, this may take a while to understand-"

Oh! Oh! Saphira poked her head above Eragon's shoulder. _Are they griffin eggs? Are they?_

It was malicious of him, perhaps. But Eragon got a real kick out of the expression on Brom's face.

* * *

><p>"Congratulations, lad," Brom said, with heavy sarcasm. "You've managed to turn everyone in the entire bloody village into a dragon rider. They're already hatching."<p>

"Well, _yeah,_ " Eragon replied, striding up to the stall he'd set up in the market two days ago. "Why else do you think I did this?"

So saying, he pulled on a cord attached to the sign, which fell off. The sign thus revealed read:

**Got questions about dragons? Ask me! Special service, one copper for any questions you want answered.**

Saphira climbed awkwardly up the side of the sign, then sat on a seat he'd added and breathed fire into the air.

"Now that looked cool," Eragon said, completely ignoring Brom. "Can you do that every ten minutes?"

I'm not an eggtimer, Saphira replied somewhat huffily.

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><p>8.1 continued<p>

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><p>As the day drew towards night, a number of winged forms landed outside Ponyville. Twilight heard the rushing of air, and exchanged a quick glance at her assistant as the newcomers slowed to a stop.<p>

"Ah, there she is," Celestia said. "Twilight!"

Twilight turned, and waved. "Princess!"

She cantered over, trailed by Spike, and caught sight of a number of familiar faces. "Hold on... Toothless? Ah, Hiccup, it's good to see you."

Hiccup grinned, coming forward to bump claw to hoof. "It's been a while, Twilight."

"You know her?" one of the other griffins asked.

Big griffin, she mused, looking around at the others in the clearing. Most of them weren't as familiar to her as the Anchor to introduce her to the wider multiverse, but she felt she at least knew the dragons... which was why it was a surprise to see two more than she was expecting. In fact, there were as many dragons as there were griffins, and that was before accounting for the two-headed Zippleback that she recalled the twins sharing.

Hiccup was talking. "...strange thing, I met her fellow loopers before I met her, but that happened the very next loop. Anyway." The feathered Viking cricked his neck. "May as well do this the local-loop way... Twilight Sparkle and Spykoranuvellitar, be known to Stoic the Vast, chief of the Hairy Hooligans â€" and my father. And be known to Thornado and Blitsif, dragons of the Hooligans."

The dragons waved. So did the Viking, though he was slightly slower off the mark.

Twilight blinked. "Hiccup? Your father's looping?"

Then she beamed. "Congratulations!"

"Yeah, it was an emotional moment all round," Hiccup admitted. "And â€" yeah, sorry that neither of your parents are yet."

"No, no, I'm..." Twilight paused. "I've accepted it. And don't... I'm happy, really. Your dad deserves it."

She kicked the floor, producing a staccato _clop_. "Anyway, we're getting a bit off topic â€" Spike, go tell Pinkie to switch to New Looper Party, and quick!"

Spike needed no further prompting, turning on his heel and dashing for the library.

"Right." Twilight glanced over at the building. "That gives us about three minutes before we're being made happy to the limits of Equestrian endurance. So, who are the dragons? More new loopers?"

Hiccup nodded. "Yep. But I'll let the chief introduce them." He stepped back smartly, past Stoic, who abruptly found himself in the conversation.

"Oh. Er... gods, Hiccup, is this revenge for all those chiefing lessons?"

"_Yes,_" Hiccup said, smiling broadly.

"You'll pay for that... anyway, this is Thornado, a Thunderdrum. This is Blitsif, a Skrill." The indicated pair of dragons bobbed their heads as indicated. "They're my dragons."

Twilight blinked. "Huh. You get two?"

There's too much of him for just one of us to carry," Thornado told her solemnly. _We have to share the workload._

Stoic shook his clawed foreleg at them. "And aye, they're always like this."

"Count yourself lucky," Twilight said, smiling. "My dragon assistant got married."

Stoic absorbed that. "Well, I can see I've got a lot to learn about this place."

At that point, Pinkie happened, and the meeting was abruptly adjourned in favour of balloon animals. (Some of them fifty feet long and made for dragons to chase. Pinkie was an equal opportunity partier.)

* * *

><p>"You," Stoic informed the Element of Laughter solemnly, "are a delight to find in a world which looks so wholesome."<p>

Berry shrugged. "It's just ale. It's not as if it's very spectacular. It's even got a physically possible proof."

"Aye, aye." Stoic waved that off, and took a draught. "But I don't have a pocket big enough yet, Gobber won't give me some of his stash, and none of the rest of the Berk loopers seem to bother much with ale."

He swilled the liquid around in the mug, and took another drink, savouring it as it went down. "Let alone ale seasoned in a...

honey-glazed barrel of pine wood with teak shavings. Delicious."

"I try," Berry allowed. "Do either of your dragons want some? I see my boyfriend is entertaining them."

Stoic glanced over at the dance floor. For most of the past hour, the dragons had been enjoying what had been advertised (with a solemn seriousness which looped back around to funny) as a Disco-rd.

He still hadn't quite gotten his head around that. It was like having Drago Bludvist running a buffet...

"Are there any villains from your baseline still around?" he asked, distracted by that thought. "I mean, there's that Nightmare Moon lass, who seems to be over there chattin' to herself and Twilight and my son and Toothless; there's this Trixie who I've been warned about not letting Thornado near; there's... Dischord?"

"Discord," Berry corrected. "Chrysalis is here as well, and even Gilda was quite unpleasant at first as I understand it. But â€" yes, there are a few. Sombra and Tirek come to mind."

"Good," Stoic said firmly. At her confusion, he went on. "I'd hate to feel like it was some kind of requirement to sort all that out."

"Oh, no, this is quite exceptional." Berry shrugged. "Anyway, the ale thing?"

"Oh, right. No, don't think so." Stoic nodded over to them. "Blitsif's more of a one for spirits, and I can't get Thornado to stop whining about Klah."

"I have some of that," Berry offered. "I don't just do alcoholic beverages."

The Thunderdrum sidled over to the bar. Did someone mention Klah?

"They did, you bottomless caffeine addict," Stoic muttered. "Quietly."

I have excellent hearing, Thornado informed them loftily.

"You're half deaf!" Stoic protested. "Were you eavesdroppin' on me again?"

You thought about Klah, I couldn't help it. Thornado tilted his head. Anyway. Do you have any, pony who knows stuff about drinks?

"Sure do." Berry rummaged for a moment, and pulled out a flask. Four seconds of heat magic from a convenient spell, and it was steaming. "Don't drink it all at once, I've not checked in a while how much I have left."

Thornado accepted the flask. I like this place, he pronounced.

"I really need to learn how to store the stuff," Stoic commented. "Or I might face some kind of revolt."

* * *

><p>8.13 (Pern)<p>

* * *

><p>"Two thousand, five hundred, and fifty two Turns," F'lar said out loud, mostly to himself.<p>

His fingers worked on the slide rule. "Three hundred and sixty two days per Turn, but that's our days... which comes out to three hundred and sixty six Earth days and change per Turn."

Another calculation, and he whistled. "Okay, 'and change' isn't going to cut it. I'm going to need to do this more precisely."

Why? Mnementh asked, sunning himself on the Weyr ledge.

"Because if I get the year length wrong by a single hour, it's going to add up to about a third of a Turn over the history of human habitation," F'lar replied. "Which is going to seriously mess with the calculation."

Just ask AIVAS. Mnementh flipped a wing, sleepily.

"I want to do this myself," F'lar answered. "I _did_ think of that, Mnementh, I'm not stupid."

Fine then. Mnementh gave him a look. _Be like that._

"I don't even _want_ to think what a pain converting the ship travel length in relativistic-adjusted time into Pernese units is going to be..."

The Anchor paused, looked at the sand table, and then angrily erased half of it.

"Sharding-" he restrained himself. "I forgot to check the results of orbital perturbation by the Red Star."

And you still want to do this by hand? Mnementh huffed, amused. _You might want to consider investing in at least a calculator._

* * *

><p>8.14<p>

* * *

><p>"Well, this could get confusing," Hiccup observed, helping his identical twin brother to stand.<p>

Toothrot wobbled slightly. "Tell me about it... it's going to take a while for me to remember how to walk. You know. Bipedally."

A thought occurred to him. "Are the others in the same position as us?"

Hiccup scanned his loop memories. "Let's see... Dad's one of

triplets, the other two being the strangest pair of uncle and aunt I've met in a while... the twins are quadruplets... and Snotlout's got a twin called Sparklout... yeah, I think it's everyone."

"Right." Toothrot shot a look at Hiccup. "Any mention _whatsoever_ of wonder twin powers-"

"What do you take me for?" Hiccup replied. "Anyway, what I _can_ tell you is that dragons are still a thing, and that they're all â€" without exception â€" those weird chaos ones from Krynn."

"Barely deserve the name," Toothrot observed. "How do you want to play this?"

In reply, Hiccup produced a large, dusty tome of magic.

"I'm thinking _Magic Circle Against Chaos,_ boost it to radius ten miles, and forget about the whole thing. That or I see if I've still got a weapon enchanted for Law damage."

"The pole arm of the law?" Toothrot suggested. "Actually, do you have a plasma cannon?"

Hiccup gave him a mildly insulted look. "Of _course_ I've got a plasma cannon. Do you want one of the Eldar ones that doesn't risk burning your hands off, or an Imperium one?"

"Imperium, of course." Toothrot frowned. "Wonder if Fishlegs and Meatlug would be willing to help me carry it..."

* * *

><p>8.15 (Pern)<p>

* * *

><p>Terrible, freezing blackness.<p>

Oblivion.

The intense fusion of love for one's dragon, torn asunder in one horrible, endless moment.

A soul, torn in half. One half vanishing forever, leaving the other broken and nearly destroyed.

Falling...

* * *

><p>...kke? Brekke?"<p>

Brekke's eyes snapped open.

The ceiling of her weyr hung overhead, lit by two mostly-shielded glowbaskets. The faint sounds of High Reaches by night crept in the open ledge.

With a slither of blankets, a shape moved in the bed next to

her.

"Are you alright, Brekke?" F'nor asked, more anxiety in his face than he was letting show in his voice. "You were sobbing."

Please, Brekke, Wirenth added, and relief suffused Brekke in a silent explosion. _Do not be sad. I am here._

As am I, Canth contributed. _Brekke, we will never let you lose Wirenth again._

"Just a dream," the weyrwoman said, in relief. "Just a dream."

F'nor touched her hair. "Nothing more, Brekke."

She kissed him, tears still glistening in her eyes. "Oh, F'nor. I'm so sorry this keeps--"

F'nor silenced her with a kiss of his own.

"This is not your fault," he said, forcefully. "It was not yours, it was not Wirenth's, it was never anyone's fault but Kylara. And as for why it still gives you nightmares..."

The first brown rider ever to be Weyrleader gently gathered up a tear from her eye. "Brekke, I've only lost Canth five times. Each time, I've known " known with the certainty of many, many Passes of experience " that he and I would meet again."

He let his hand drop. "And it still almost destroyed me."

Brekke felt the two dragons communicating amongst themselves. From courtesy, she didn't listen in.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw them move to twine necks, eyes shimmering with a tropical sea-green.

"But you are here, and I am here, and Wirenth and Canth are out there," F'nor went on. "We are, all of us, alive."

He then held out his arms, and Brekke let him embrace her.

"So, if you have nightmares " that's normal. But don't let them ruin your waking hours."

Brekke squeezed him tightly.

"Thank you," she whispered fiercely. "I love you so."

"As do I," he replied. Then, smiling for levity's sake, broke the embrace. "Now, come on. Bed! We've got work to do tomorrow, there's a council meeting in the afternoon."

Brekke lay back in the bed, pulling the blankets back up from where they had fallen.

Sleep well, one of the dragons murmured to her. She couldn't quite tell which one.

* * *

><p>8.16 (MasterWeaver)<p>

* * *

><p>"...and we, the undersigned, do hereby ratify this treaty."<p>

The vikings all stared as the night fury, dressed in a strange black and white garb with what looked to be a glass butterfly perched on its snout, stoically signed the document provided by the chieftain's son. He nodded solemnly and pinned the parchment up on the wall of the keep. "There we go, all nice and civilized..."

Suddenly the door burst open, Stoic the Vast walking in. "Well, I'm back from my... search..."

He blinked twice, taking in the odd garb his son was wearing. And the matching set on the dragon that was delicately sipping a mug of mead.

"...Hiccup, are you wearing a glass on your eye?"

"Actually, dear father, it is known as a monocle."

"Ah." He flicked his gaze to the night fury. "And... why is that dragon wearing the same thing as you?"

"This is a three piece suit, dear father." Hiccup burshed some dust off his shoulder. "It is tradition to wear such an outfit when negotiating peace."

"...you negotiated peace."

"Yes."

"...with the dragons."

Hiccup coughed. "Well, to be precise, I negotiated peace with the refugee population of the Helheim dragon's nest... but, yes, the majority of them are dragons."

Stoic took a moment to process his son's statement. "That is... that... I don't think that's the Viking way, son."

"Oh, dear father, I'm not a viking," Hiccup replied. "I... am a lawyer."

* * *

><p>8.1 continued<p>

* * *

><p>"Not bad," Twilight allowed, looking at the heavily concussed Tirek lying on the floor. "How'd you pull that off?"

"Little help from my son," Stoic allowed, hefting a very large hammer. "Field of antimagic on my body, and there wasn't anything for him to drain. Then I just hit him a lot."

"Huh." Twilight nodded. "I see. So, the simple solution then?"

"Sometimes works best," Stoic confirmed. "Now, that is about it, right?"

"Pretty much it for our loop, yes." Twilight shrugged. "So far, anyway. How have you liked it here?"

The burly griffin considered that. "Good, I think," he allowed. "You're all very accommodating, which is nice â€" that Gilda was especially helpful with, er, the... you know, griffin thing â€" but at the same time, it isn't boring."

He shrugged his wings with care. "One downside of Pern, it's a wee bit repetitive at times."

"I see what you mean," Twilight said, with another nod. "Yes, we do try to make sure that there are challenges â€" for those who want them."

She indicated the groaning centaur. "Case in point."

"And the non-looping villagers are pretty nice too," Stoic went on. "I mean, they got used to the dragons pretty sharpish. Well, mostly."

As he spoke, Roseluck crossed the square heading to the shops. She had a pair of blinkers on, and was determinedly looking straight ahead.

"I did talk to her about that." Twilight winced. "She does understand, it's just... well, she can't get over the fear response. The blinkers are a compromise, and we agreed on it."

"Aye, well." Stoic rubbed his beak with a claw. "Suppose it's the best we can hope for."

Twilight shrugged, awkwardly. "That's the way of things, I think. Muddle through as best we all can."

"As for you," she went on, more brightly, "I'm glad to see you're getting on so well with looping."

"Thank Hiccup, not me," Stoic told her. "And Blitsif and Thornado, of course. It's still painful, knowing my wife isn't with me," he added, with a sigh. "But those two keep me grounded."

"From what I've heard, those two are more likely to need grounding from you." Twilight smiled. "Anyway, I need to go see Pinkie. It's not long until the end-of-loop party, and-"

There was a loud boom.

"Oh, not again," she sighed, and turned to look out over Ponyville.

Sure enough, her library was on fire.

Thornado flapped to a halt on a rooftop. _Sorry,_ he said, wincing.
My fault, I sneezed. Hold on a minute.

He took flight again, vanished.

There was a splashing noise, loud enough to be heard even over the distance from there to the dam, and then Thornado reappeared and dumped about ten tons of water on the tree-library.

Twilight blanched, and vanished in a teleport of her own.

* * *

><p>"...the fire was bad enough, but to dump water on it as well?"

Twilight shook her head. "It's a library! Fire and flood... what could be worse?"

Hiccup pointed a claw at her. "You know as well as I do that all your books were too well shielded to be damaged."

"It is the principle of the thing!"

Twilight sighed, then looked back up at her fellow Anchor. "You're right, of course. This is practically nothing by the standards of what usually happens to my library."

There was a crack of tearing air.

"And I installed a lightning rod," she went on, without missing a beat. "So that's all sorted out."

Hiccup had to chuckle. "Nice work. Well, nice seeing you, Twilight. And it's been too long since I last saw Spike."

Twilight nodded to him. "Do convey my greetings to Leah next time you see her, it's been a while since I saw her as well. I want to make sure she's alright."

"She will be," Hiccup said, shrugging. "I know what her baseline was like, but by now she's as tough as old boots and twice as good at kicking jerks."

Toothless shouldered the door open. _Are you two going to join in the party or what?_

"Well, we'd better go," Hiccup nodded towards the door. "The unholy offspring of lightning and death has spoken."

"Ooh!" Pinkie said, poking her head through the door just underneath Toothless. "Is it time for you to Get Down with a Night Fury?"

I could just sit on you, you know, Toothless observed.

* * *

><p>AN:<p>

8.1: Visiting old friends, with new ones.

>8.2: They are essentially pretending to be part of hit sitcom That's My Dragon!
>8.3: Robinton gets his teeth repeatedly kicked in by fate, baseline. At least now he can redress things.
>8.4: They like each other really.
>8.5: Snotlout Augustus, Basileus of Rhomanion. (Well, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, if you want to keep it simple.)
>8.6: A bond which will last forever.
>8.7: Dragonsinger. (Fire lizards that have been dragons retain their intelligence from that point on.)
>8.8: Sometimes, though, Impression is Inconvenient with a capital I. (If you're wondering why he's pleasant, see the MLP Loops sets 66.6 and 75.2.)
>8.9: Can't see the fellow woodworker for the trees.

>8.10: The uncomfortable feeling when your pop culture reference falls absolutely flat. At least Farli will get it.
>8.11: Hal's world is pretty damn brutal. WW1 with swords and fireless dragons.

>8.12: At what point does the term Weyr become more appropriate than village? (Yes, these are all local Alagaesian dragons.)
>8.13: Some things, you want to do yourself. If you're slightly crazy.
>8.14: How To Twin Your Dragon.
>8.15: Not on F'nor's watch.

>8.16: Given that the historical Vikings were the single most metal lawyers in history - yes, they did indeed take on your cases pro bono just to prove how badass they were, and the Icelandic law court was held inside a rift between two tectonic plates... well, Stoic might well be quite proud.<p>

9. Chapter 9

Caution: these contain spoilers for the second film.

Note: There are a fair few non-HTTYD loops in this set. This fic will now contain some loops from other dragon-centric settings at times. (Not Spyro, though, that's got its own set.)

* * *

><p>9.1 (Pern)<p>

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><p>"Okay, Farli," Piemur said, rubbing his hands together. "You up for this?"<p>

Farli nodded, with a chirp. _Sure thing!_

Piemur looked over the cliff again. "Looks like... what, at least three or four hundred feet?"

About that. Farli launched herself from his shoulder, and began to orbit over the cliff edge. _Straight drop, deep water... but here's hoping you won't need it._

"I'll need water somewhere, unless you can lift a lot more than I was expecting," Piemur countered. "Where are you aiming?"

The dragon stones just outside Half-Circle, the queen fire-lizard informed him. _I have good views of the place from Beauty, Rocky and

Diver._

"Right." Piemur rubbed his hands together again, and huffed a couple of times. "Right," he said again. "Here we go!"

He took two quick steps, then a longer stride, and jumped straight off the edge of the cliff.

For a moment, he hung over the rim of the Southern continent. Then he began to fall.

Farli's tail wrapped around his arm as he fell, and then-

Blackness.

* * *

><p>Yes! Piemur exulted, in the freezing nothingness of Between. _It does work!_

Barely, Farli huffed. _Carrying you makes my head hurt._

Then they were back in the real, and Farli untangled from his arm just in time for Piemur to turn his fall into a dive.

The water hit like being slapped in the face. Piemur went deep, carried by the momentum Farli hadn't been able to fully shed and the additional speed from the fall on the other side of the jump, and it took him several seconds to come to the surface.

"Whoo!" he shouted, and waved at his worried fire-lizard. "That was _amazing!_ Farli, you're a star!"

Well, we knew that... Farli flirted her tail, and settled down to circle him as he swam back towards the shore. _Seriously, though, that gave me quite a headache. I think you're at about the limit of what I can carry through Between._

"For now," Piemur retorted, undampened. "We'll get better. We always do."

Sure we will. As Piemur reached the beach, she fluttered down to land gratefully back on his shoulder. _But, yes, that was quite impressive._

She looked around. _So, when are we going to eat?_

Piemur blanched. "...oh, shards. I just realized that we left everything on the southern continent."

Even that set of pan-pipes that I like? Farli asked, her tone a little sharp.

"Even the pan pipes, yes," Piemur confirmed. "Whoops."

Whoops doesn't even begin to cover it, Farli muttered. _Okay, either we find some way to get back there, or I bring everything over one small object at a time._

"I vote we head back," Piemur volunteered. "Just wait for my clothes to dry, so you don't end up carrying a Piemursicle back south."

* * *

><p>9.2<p>

* * *

><p>"Behold!" the changeling queen called. "Behold the might of my changeling horde!"<p>

She then launched into a really rather respectable musical number written for a solo part and ten-voice harmony backing.

"Er..." Twilight raised a hoof. "Shouldn't you be, well... infiltrating?"

The queen reached the end of her song (it had started off being about ultimate power, but had somehow switched topics to pies).

"Oh, probably," she admitted. "I just thought â€" what's the point? I mean, it's not as if there's something I actually need from an invasion."

Twilight frowned, then decided this had to be a looper. "Why not?" she asked, choosing to pull the thread and see where this went.

"Well, I don't need much in the way of love," the queen explained. "I mean, I only have ten changelings."

She paused for a moment, then smiled and tapped one on the shoulder. "Of course I love you."

The other changeling â€" one with gold highlights instead of the usual green â€" looked mollified.

"Only ten?" Twilight blinked. "That's... well, actually quite ridiculously small."

"But it means I know them all by name," the queen replied easily. "This here is Beauty, and this is Rocky, and these two are Diver and Poll." She looked up. "I'm not boring you, am I?"

"You tell me, you're the telepath," Twilight retorted.

"Actually, it's hard enough sorting out the voices of just ten changelings," the queen replied. "Especially when they're keeping up a running commentary. Anyway, these three are Mimic-

"At last, a proper changeling name," Twilight interrupted.

"Don't expect it to last," the queen said. "And these are Lazybones and Brownie. These two ones with the green highlights are Auntie One and Auntie Two, and the blue one is Uncle."

"Auntie One and Auntie Two..." Twilight repeated. "Wait a second, I know who you are!"

"Oh?" The queen raised an eyebrow. "Do tell."

"Welcome to Equestria, Menolly," Twilight said by way of answer. "I should have realized sooner. How often do you see a _brown_ changeling?"

Mimic looked hurt, and transformed into a copy of Twilight. Brownie looked down at himself and shrugged, and Lazybones had already fallen asleep.

"I have to say, though, this _does_ explain how early you attacked," she added. "If you can call this an attack. I mean, usually there's an Ursa around this time..."

The library window banged open.

"Trixie is still not speaking to that har-"

"Trixie," Twilight said warningly.

"-per." Trixie looked mulish for a moment. "Trixie does appreciate that the harper in question is not behind the disappearance of her marefriend, but she is also a little bit moody right now."

The window banged shut again.

"So, anyway," Twilight said, brightly. "Have you met Sweetie Belle before?"

"I don't think so," Menolly answered, as Beauty started organizing the rest of the hordette to put their instruments away again. "Why?"

"Oh, she's a musician by trade and talent," Twilight told her. "She was Sebell once â€" barely needed a name change... anyway, she once helped sing Arda into existence."

"Really?" Menolly looked interested at that. "Perhaps we should compare notes..."

* * *

><p>"Sorry?" F'lar asked. "Could you repeat that?"<p>

"I said," Chrystal repeated, slowly, then paused. "Shut up!" she shouted.

The deafening cacophany of wings abated, replaced by the occasional shifting of clawed feet on grass.

There was still a _lot_ of noise, given how many sets of clawed feet there were. But it was manageable.

"Anyway," Chrystal continued, projecting her voice with all the force her sixteen-year-old body could manage. "I appear to have Impressed a very large number of fire lizards."

She scanned the field â€" and the other fields, covered by shifting multicolored bodies all the way to the horizon. "Possibly all of them."

With a cough, she returned her attention to the Benden Weyrleader.
"Do you have a need of about thirty-five thousand fire lizards?"

"Not that I can think of, no..." F'lar admitted.

* * *

><p>9.3<p>

* * *

><p>Stoic stumbled out of bed. Grumbling, he picked up his helmet and jammed it on his head, then stomped to the door.<p>

"It's four in the bloody morning, what do you want?" he asked... then noticed just who had knocked at the door.

Good morning sir, said the large, black dragon standing on the mat (and, of course, on quite a lot of the street). It was wearing some kind of white linen starched shirt, a thing resembling a greatcoat, and some strange red noose-like contrivance around its neck. _I'd like to talk to you about Bahamut._

"...what in blazes?" Stoic managed.

Well, Bahamut is our lord and saviour. He is the Platinum Dragon, the most powerful in all the nine realms. The strange dragon pushed his foot into the door, preventing Stoic from closing it even if he'd had the presence of mind to try. _I have this book, which tells you all about the Shining Nebula, and his attendant golden dragons._

The whole situation was so bizarre, Stoic didn't know quite what to say.

"Er..." he tried, and realized that sounded stupid. "I mean-" was his next attempt, which wasn't much better.

I'll just leave this with you. The dragon dropped a large book with an embossed nebula in argent paint on the front from... well, somewhere... and placed a small piece of paper atop it. _Please, call this number if you have any further questions._

With that, the dragon took wing and flew off.

"Everything all right, Dad?" Hiccup asked, before glancing down. "Oh, great," he sighed, picking the book up. "Another of those island-to-island preachers. Sorry, I would have got that one, but I was clearly more asleep than you."

* * *

><p>9.4 (Pern)<p>

* * *

><p>-Menolly blinked, and heard a deep thrumming around her.<p>

Hatching ground, she thought, looking around at once-familiar never-forgotten spectacle; over a hundred dragons giving voice to an ancient rite. Her palms itched with the want to harmonize with it, even though it felt vaguely like blasphemy.

A further glance located her " Benden " and her memories told the time.

About twelve years before the onset of the Ninth Pass. Which made it interesting that there was a _queen_ egg rocking on the sands before her, to go with a paltry eleven others.

Now she understood why Ramoth always talked about Nemorth in frankly scathing tones.

A whistle " almost the exact sound of a fire-lizard diving for a fish " made her look over, seeing Piemur waving one hand at her next to Sebell.

Huh, she thought. All three of them together. That could mean something interesting was up.

The first shell cracked.

I am Diver, said a voice into her mind, as the bronze pushed his way out of the shell and staggered onto the sand.

Something irreverent crossed her mind about hidebound idiots and heart attacks. Bronzes were the preserve of _male_ riders.

When a second egg cracked, revealing another bronze, it was Piemur's turn to break into a grin. As Diver reached Menolly, Piemur started forward to help his (unusually, male) companion finish shedding the shell.

Sebell moved next, taking another bronze. Poor Kimi and Farli " this was going to be a rather strange loop, for them.

Menolly heard a series of gasps from the other girls, grouped around the queen egg. She looked up-

And practically fell over, as rainbow eyes focused on her from all over the cavern.

I am Rocky/Poll/Beauty/Brownie/Uncle...

* * *

><p>F'lar couldn't help sniggering.<p>

"This is completely ridiculous!" R'gul seethed, looking down from the ledge at two new bronze riders and one chronically overworked female... _everything_ rider.

The wingleader shrugged. "Dragons choose, riders obey. So, how's that tradition thing coming along?" F'lar sniggered again. "Do we shorten the girl's name or not? I'm quite fond of M'ly, but if we shorten it for every Impression her name would be nothing but apostrophes and about negative three letters by now."

* * *

><p>9.5 (Pern)<p>

* * *

><p>"Sebell."<p>

The indicated harper " currently a Journeyman, but that wouldn't last " looked up. "Sir?"

"Oh, stop it," Robinton said, sitting down. "You've known me long enough that Robinton is fine."

"I do, that's true," Sebell agreed. "But you're worth enough that _sir_ is entirely appropriate... sir."

Robinton chuckled. "Fair enough." He paused, making idle marks in the sand. Some of them became musical signatures, and he whistled the tune thus made.

"Shave and a haircut?" Sebell asked, perplexed.

The master harper winked. Then paused, and sighed. "Sorry. Mind wanders, you know how it is. I did have a purpose, coming to see you."

Sebell waited patiently.

"Well..." Another pause. "Sebell... you and Menolly, and Piemur, are in many ways the... the family I never had."

Almost too quickly to be seen, the younger Harper's eyes flicked to the kitchen.

"Yes, I know," Robinton agreed, heavily. "There's Camo. But... oh, shards!" The oath came out in a strangled hiss, and Sebell gave his Master a concerned look. "Too many regrets."

"We have the chance to redress them," Sebell reminded him, urgently. "You do everything you can " I've seen that!"

"Sometimes, nothing is enough, and everything is insufficient." Robinton smiled tiredly. "I do go and see him, you know. Every day, now. And I have Zair keep company with him and Sandy when I am absolutely unable to do so."

Sebell gave a silent nod.

"And... oh, sometimes, it really _does_ feel like Sandy is helping him." Unshed tears gathered in Robinton's eyes. "But then, I catch myself being _so_ happy, and then I feel guilty that I... I can't love him, not nearly as much as he really deserves."

The younger harper took his hand, and then flung an arm over Robinton's shoulder.

For a long minute, they just sat there.

Then Robinton shook his head, and pulled away. "Sorry you had to see

that, Sebell," he said, wincing. "I think it's what I actually came here for â€" making me maudlin."

He rummaged in his pouch, and pulled out a dozen thin-leaf pages of Fandarel's new paper. "Here, Sebell. I think you deserve to know it â€" and she deserves to hear it."

Sebell took the paper, and unfolded it â€" glimpsing the musical notes in Robinton's steady hand, across the paper. It was for a single instrument, though there were notes on how to expand it out for multiple instruments if desired.

There were the occasional slightly blurred patches on the notes, and he frowned at them â€" trying to divine what they could result from. If it had been hide, he'd have said it was a thin or rough patch, but the paper was uniform.

Then he reached the first page, and gasped.

"Sir, I-

"You deserve to know it," Robinton repeated, "And she deserves to hear it."

"How did you stand to write this out?" Sebell asked, running his fingers along the measures, and realizing that the blurred patches were damp.

There were four of them on the neatly written title.

Sonata to Sea-Green Eyes.

"Maybe, one of these loops, I'll work up the courage to hear it played again," Robinton said, and stood.

Sebell watched him leave, and had to fight back tears himself.

* * *

><p>"This is the piece he wrote for his wife?" Menolly asked, sight-reading. Beauty bent down over the paper, and started experimentally piping a few bars.<p>

"That's right," Sebell confirmed. "I think he only managed to perform it for her a few times, before she died."

"I've heard the story," Menolly said, slowly. "I got it out of Petiron once. But â€" it's so hard to remember, when you look at the man. To hide that much pain..."

Sebell touched her arm, and she fell silent.

"I hope he manages to hear it again, as well," Sebell said after several minutes of silence, as the two Harpers scanned over the sheets. "This is probably his masterpiece."

I agree, Beauty sent softly. _You _might_ be able to do better, but I am not sure._

* * *

><p>9.6 (Pern)<p>

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><p>"Here he is," F'lessan said, softly.<p>

Lessa reached out, and touched the babe's hair. "Selessan," she said, recalling the name her son had chosen. "My grandson."

Tears welled in her eyes.

"Are you alright, mother?" F'lessan asked, adjusting his grip. "You've seen Sellie before, I mean," he added, in rather quieter tones.

Lessa's hand dropped, and she sighed.

"F'lessan," she said, motioning the Bronze rider to sit. "You are my only son, and I have often felt guilty that I could not give F'lar another. I looked at Kylara, with her five, and wished I could have tried to have more than one. And then, with the start of the loops..."

She sighed. "You're the only one I ever have. After you, I stop even conceiving, in every life after the first."

F'lessan blinked â€" he'd not known that.

"I did notice that I've only ever had children with the same weyrmates as from that first time, yes," F'lessan admitted.

Lessa swallowed. "F'lessan... recently, we met someone else who was looping in time. He told us a lot â€" like that the word for F'lar is 'Anchor', and that we're not the only world doing it. And..." She swallowed again, and looked around â€" uncharacteristically meek.

"You don't know how lucky you are that you and Tai had Tessai," she said, quickly. "F'lessan â€" he explained _why_ I've only ever had you."

The young bronze rider looked up, alert.

"Children you didn't have the first time can't happen if you're looping in time," she told him, a hitch in her voice. "If they were, then it has to be the same parents."

F'lessan blinked, then looked down at Selessan's sleeping form with a quick, jerky motion.

"From what he said," Lessa continued, "F'lar and I are two of the few looping people with grandchildren."

I have many eggs who were not born the first time, Ramoth said, puzzled. _And they have many eggs in turn â€" Brekke's Wirenth has already laid dozens of eggs she did not the first time._

"I don't know, Ramoth," Lessa said, aloud for the benefit of her son. "Are there any you laid once that you miss?"

Ramoth's reply was a long time coming.

I do not remember any, she said eventually. _All the ones for whom I care are always here â€" Golanth, Wirenth, Ruth, Path... and that is it._

Lessa directed a tart look at the door. "Maternal instincts of a small rock... which is probably why. He said it was to stop us from... reacting badly."

F'lessan frowned slightly.

"Imagine it, F'lessan," Lessa said, impatiently. "Imagine watching Selessan grow up, Impress a dragon, become the fine young man who we both know he is... and then, vanish. And you'll never, _ever_, see him again."

Lessa watched as her son's eyes widened, and he blanched â€" flicking a look down at Selessan again.

"That's what we were told, anyway," she went on. "And... F'lessan, I don't know what to think about it."

She sighed. "On the one hand â€" it makes me wish that F'lar and I had tried harder, the first time. I had you, I could have given you a sister, or a brother. But we lost that for all lifetimes to come."

Ramoth crooned outside, very softly.

"I think it's the reason I've been looking out for Jaxom and Mirrim," she observed, quietly. "We're used to fosterlings, after all. But... in another way, I'm lucky. Very, very few of us time-loopers ever have grandchildren."

She stood, and smiled down at the sleeping Selessan.

"I think I can live with it," she finished.

* * *

><p>9.7<p>

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><p>Drago looked from chieftain to chieftain. "Do you not see?" he asked. "The only way you can escape the danger of the dragons is to follow me. Give yourselves and your tribes to me, or you will die to the dragon menace."<p>

This resulted in laughter.

"I am the only one who can stop the dragons!" Drago repeated, then shook his head. "Fine, then. Die."

The ceiling collapsed.

Rather to the surprise of Drago, no dragon came though.

What did you just say about me? everyone heard, as though someone was shouting just outside. _You're cruisin' for a bruisin', mate!_

Yeah, leave her alone! Another voice added. _Right, that's it!_

Snarls came through the roof. Fire flickered, small explosions rumbled, and the occasional flash of lightning could be seen.

Then something landed outside with a loud _craaash._

Oh, running away are we? asked the first voice. _Sod that!_

Hold him down, Blitz! The second one weighed in, and then there were more crashes and the roaring sound of flame.

A ball of dragons smashed through the east wall of the council chamber in a thrashing mass, clawing and biting. It moved steadily across the chamber over the course of about ten seconds â€" interrupted by at least one choke-slam, a beer stein being broken over a draconic head, and a blast of crackling lightning â€" and exited through the west wall without apparently noticing the humans... or the wall.

Right, gotcha! The second voice said. _Now, say sorry to my friend or she goes and gets a pool cue._

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><p>9.8 (Pern)<p>

* * *

><p>"So, anyway," F'nor said, apropos of nothing. Then blinked. "Blast. I hate it when I loop before I finish telling a story."<p>

I know how it ends, Canth told him.

"Yeah, but that Ranma guy didn't. And now he's going to have to wait to hear the ending." F'nor scratched his ear. "What kind of dragon name is Nekokenth anyway?"

He stretched. "Okay, when are-"

Bugger, he sent to Canth, on parsing his loop memories for the Turn and the month. _Danger zone. Quick, bespeak Wirenth!_

Canth took a moment to reply. When he did, his mental tone was as urgent as F'nor felt. _She's just woken up â€" and she's heading to blood her kills._

"Shards. Crisis time." F'nor broke into a sprint. "Canth â€" bespeak Lessa directly, get her to have _every sharding queen and available green on Pern_ on alert. Tell them to time it if if they have to!"

Canth's wings were already spread. The brown vaulted off the weyr ledge just before F'nor reached him, and he jumped to land on the

rearmost spine with harness straps just before Canth went
Between.

* * *

><p>Bronzes were already gathering around High Reaches when Canth burst into the crisp mountain air, and he had to shed height awkwardly to avoid a collision.<p>

F'nor fumbled with the straps, released himself earlier than was probably wise, and landed hard on the floor of the bowl. Canth used the extra few seconds thus gained wisely, swooping down on a buck and killing it with a single swipe of his claws before blooding it "avoiding the heavy flesh that would slow him down in the flight to come.

"Shards," the brown rider muttered, feeling his hip. "I'll be feeling that tomorrow..."

He shook his head. "Grall " where's Brekke?"

With a chitter, his golden fire-lizard indicated the way to go.

Wirenth is already on her third kill, Canth reported. _And Lessa has your message. She was not Awake " I had to explain._

Well done, Canth, F'nor sent back breathlessly. _Just so long as it's done._

* * *

><p>Prideth sat, tail lashing metronomically, on the heights over Nabol.<p>

She loved Kylara, really she did. But the woman who was her other half _was_ strange sometimes.

Why did the Lord Holder of Nabol hold so much interest for her? T'bol was much nicer, in Prideth's opinion, and so was N'ton. Actually, almost anyone was nicer than Lord Meron.

He was cruel to the little ones, the fire lizards. That, in Prideth's mind, was very wrong.

But Kylara liked him, so there must be something good about him.

There must be.

A keen reached her ears, and she looked up and around. Saw a golden shape launch from the High Reaches Weyr, followed by dozens of bronze ones, glittering in the sunlight.

Her nostrils flared.

Normally, a queen would have been kept away when another was close to rising, especially if she was not too far off her cycle herself.

Normally, this was only a precaution.

But normally, a queen rider was more responsible than Kylara, who was doing the equivalent of reacting to a fire drill by smoking next to a leaky gas main.

Mine! Prideth thought, wings unfurling. Not yours! Mine! My flight!

She leapt into the air, barely controlled her short glide, and began lashing out at the terrified runner-beasts in the inner Hold for blood to fuel her flight.

At which point, approximately eight hundred green dragons and nearly twenty queens materialized overhead, and ten of the nearest tackled her.

* * *

><p>"That was far too close, F'lar," F'nor said, the next morning. "Kylara's been ranting for hours about interference, but that... that bitch is lucky to be sane and you and I both know it. Prideth doesn't deserve to be latched to someone that stupid and headstrong."

"Kylara was... a huge mistake," F'lar admitted. "Back then we needed dragons â€" especially Queen dragons â€" more than we needed riders and weyrwomen who would play well with others."

He sighed. "Maybe Lessa can talk some sense into her-" he ignored F'nor's open scoff "-by reminding her that Prideth would have died, if nothing else. Two queens fight, and half the time even forewarned we can't get to them before one or both are mortally wounded."

F'nor gave F'lar a look. "That's all well and good, but what happens if I awaken a minute later? What happens if I'm not Awake at all?"

"Then I will have Mnementh time it and do something impressively magical to Kylara, her dragon, or both." F'lar fixed his half-brother's gaze. "F'nor, I'm doing all I can. If I can, Kylara never gets Prideth in the first place. If she's Impressed, I get her as far away from Brekke as possible and try to control her. If we have even as little as an hour before Wirenth rises, I go to Nabol with half a wing and remove Prideth bodily from the danger radius. What more can I do?"

F'nor dropped his gaze.

"I don't know, F'lar," he said eventually. "I know you can't change what's already happened in a loop. But-" he punched the wall, ignoring the blood that produced on his knuckles.

"How many times does this have to happen?" he asked. "For a mercy, Brekke's never looped in after losing Wirenth, but... if she does, I'll still feel I failed her. Even though there's absolutely nothing I could possibly have done."

F'lar put his hand on the other rider's shoulder.

"F'nor... I'm not sure if you really comprehend what you did yesterday," he said, slowly. "You just went from a standing start to save Wirenth, get Canth there in time to _fly_ Wirenth, and you did it without using _anything_ out-loop and in less than five minutes."

He then gave a weak chuckle. "Just... you're a Weyrleader now, and I know as well as you that that means responsibility. Try not to be _too_ smug, though I'm sure Canth will be smug enough for both of you."

"Tell me about it," F'nor agreed, accepting the move to a safer topic. "You know I had to cadge a lift off a blue rider to get here? He's been wrapped around Wirenth since the moment they landed yesterday. And none of the bronze riders have looked me in the eye since..."

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><p>9.9<p>

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><p>"Gladius, check... glaive, check... guisarme, check..."<p>

Repeated _clang_ noises echoed through the Jorgenson household. No two of them was quite the same, most of them sounded more like a clatter, and one or two of them had a definite wooden feel to them on top of the crisp belling of steel striking stone.

"Spatha, check... spetum-

There was a crack.

"Not check..."

That is the fourth one that has broken, Hookfang observed.

"Yeah, I know..." Snotlout retrieved a trident from his pocket, and briefly inspected it. "Trident, check..."

He threw it onto the extremely large pile of weapons taking up most of the main room.

"Urgosh, check... and whip, check. Well, that's my chores for the loop sorted out." Snotlout reached down, and " in a display of space manipulation which would have given headaches to anyone who watched it and looked like a cheap special effect on a screen " packed the whole stack of weapons into his left trouser pocket, where it vanished from view.

All that remained on the floor of the house were two broken polearms and the shattered bits of a pair of swords.

Why do you bother, anyway? Hookfang asked. _You have many weapons which are magical, and you can just have me do things anyway._

"It's the style of it all, Hook." Snotlout motioned him over to a patch of bare earth just outside. "Okay, I've still got a couple of

blanks, so we'll start with the arming sword. Remember, continuous stream."

The Nightmare duly complied, inhaling carefully before producing a slow, thin line of liquid fire that burned blue-white with heat.

Snotlout held a lump of metal into it, whistling a slightly off-key version of _Through the Fire and Flames._

After about a minute, it was glowing a lemon-yellow colour, and Snotlout took it out of the stream. He placed it on the bare earth and raised his bare palm, which shimmered briefly, before beating the sword blank into shape with his hand.

That always looks somehow strange, Hookfang observed, watching his rider at work.

Snotlout hissed through his teeth. "Well, I had to do _something_ with those Monk powers, didn't I? I mean, it's pretty fun to try to beat major bad stuff with entirely mundane weapons, but doing it bare handed is boring because that Ranma guy does it all the time."

After heating the blank and beating it a couple more times, Snotlout sprinkled on a pinch of titanium dust and some vanadium. Then tossed it to Hookfang, who caught it in his teeth, hopped into the air and went _Between_.

* * *

><p>There you go, Hookfang reported, a few minutes later. _One _Between-_cooled sword._

He frowned as Snotlout retrieved it. _Does it still count as mundane?_

"Of course it does," Snotlout replied. "Right, that's that one. Let's handle the others tomorrow, I want to give this a test. Where's there a convenient hydra..."

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><p>9.10<p>

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><p>"Little slower," Hiccup said firmly, to get his voice heard through the windrush. "Okay, good! Now, slant down, pick up speed, and-"<p>

He released the string.

A carefully made arrow, with a simple triangular head and flight feathers made with shed falcon-pinions, missed the target utterly.

"Ah, not _again,_ " Hiccup sighed, as Toothless gained height. "I'm too used to Framherja."

Forgetting the arrow drop? Toothless asked, banking around for

another run.

"That's it exactly. That and travel time."

Toothless laughed.

"Oh, shut up..." Hiccup nocked another arrow on the string, drew-aimed-fired in a blur of motion, and turned to see where it had hit. "Okay, that was a little better. But this is going to take _ages_."

You could always give up this plan, Toothless pointed out, wings caressing the air. He pulled up, rolled, flipped and came back along the reciprocal of his previous path.

"Not even slightly interested," Hiccup shot back. He readied the next arrow, aimed, and fired. Then, as Toothless swept past the still-untouched target, he quickly fired a second.

"Nope, that didn't work either..." he said, throwing up his hands. "Toothless, it's all very impressive that you move faster than an arrow in flight, but it does make it nearly impossible to do a Parthian shot."

Let me guess. You fired it backwards, but it was still moving away from the target.

"Yep. Okay, let's try something new. Think you can fly straight at the target?"

Of course I can fly straight at the target. The issue is whether the target survives. Toothless performed another wingover, and dropped â€" much closer to the grassy hillside, this time. _Here goes._

Hiccup readied yet another arrow, and sighted just off Toothless' left earlobe as they bored in.

He took two slow, deep breaths, closed one eye- and loosed.

"Well?" he asked, looking back.

Hm, Toothless hedged. _Technically, you hit it. But I was going so close I blew the target off the cliff with my wingtip vortex. This isn't going to work in combat._

"Baby steps, Toothless, baby steps." Hiccup rummaged around for more arrows. "Okay, this time go... about five feet higher."

I did say we blew the target off the cliff, right? Toothless checked. _I'm going to let you carry it back up, I'm not doing it every time._

The Fury banked, shedding speed and height, and made a neat landing just next to the slightly tattered archery butt at the bottom of a low cliff.

Well? Toothless asked, lying pointedly down on the hillside. _Get on with it._

"Okay, okay, I get it, I'm rusty at this..." Hiccup unlatched himself from the stirrups, and hefted the butt up on his shoulders. "Give me a few minutes to get this done..."

* * *

><p>9.11<p>

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><p>"You know, Ruth, sometimes I contemplate just pretending not to be Awake."<p>

Lord Jaxom of Ruatha leant back against the pale hide of his dragon, sighing, and looked over the checklist.

How many problems have they left us this time? Ruth asked, joining his rider in checking the list. _Ouch. That's a long list._

"Yeah, tell me about it." Jaxom sighed. "Every time. Every single time that we're Awake, they just don't bother to fix half the time travel stuff and let us get on with it."

At least we got that nice letter from Jormugandr once, Ruth observed. _It is good to be appreciated._

"Yeah. Well, suppose we should get started." Jaxom pushed himself up. "First stop, Ruatha hold, three days before I was born. Lessa didn't bother going back to give herself that premonition." He put the list in his mouth to free up his hands, and began checking Ruth's harness.

Is that the worst one? Ruth asked.

Not even close, Jaxom replied, mind-to-mind this time. _There's one where apparently eighty fire lizards swarmed Kylara when she was about to try and take some to Lord Meron, one where Brekke got given a letter which called her urgently away to South Boll of all places the day before Wirenth rose by, and I quote, a 'tall dark stranger'..._

Jaxom slipped a belt into the appropriate slot for Ruth's current growth " just a shade shy of his normal full growth " and buckled it in place, before vaulting up onto the white dragon's shoulder.

And " it lacked only this! - the entire population of the Old Timers was brought forward by a mysterious man on a black dragon, wearing what amounts to a space suit.

Oh, one of those. Ruth looked back at his rider, who was taking the list out of his mouth again. _Are we _certain_ H'cup and Toothleth aren't here?_

"We're certain alright," Jaxom said, stowing the list somewhere safe. "Yep, it's river mud for us again once we've handled our other jobs."

Ruth made a displeased note. _That stuff stinks. Oh well. At least we can go and properly meet Sharra. What should our story be?_

"Same as usual, old friend," Jaxom informed him. "Harper gossip. Piemur and Farli are wonderful scapegoats for this kind of thing."

They really are. Ruth swept his wings up, and launched himself into the air on the downbeat. _Okay, here we go. Same place, different time._

Black, blacker, blackest...

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><p>9.12<p>

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><p>"Okay, next up, the Patronus." Harry twirled his wand, giving the newcomer an appraising look. "Essential around here, could be convenient in your baseline if you don't have the ability to send quick and uninterceptable messages."<p>

Eragon exchanged a look with his owl. For reasons unknown, in a loop with about a dozen different species of dragon, Saphira was an owl.

A burrowing owl, just to rub it in. She weighed less than half a pound. That did, however, make it easier for her to perch on his shoulder. (She could probably perch on his shirt pocket.)

"Yes, that could be helpful," Eragon allowed. "Let's see it."

Harry raised his wand. "Expecto Patronum."

A huge white stag erupted into being. It cantered around in a circle to stand next to its summoner, and gave a snort which left misty breath hanging in the air for a moment.

"Don't expect this kind of performance," Harry added, tapping his patronus to show it was solid before running his hand along its spine. It leaned into the stroke, making small noises of pleasure, before rearing up and dissolving into a cloud of warm white shimmers. "If you couldn't tell, I use this _all the time_, which means I've probably spent more time casting the Patronus spell than you have... well, than you have doing everything."

Saphira hooted.

"What should we expect?" Eragon asked, translating.

"Depends on who you are and how well you do. I get a stag, you'll get something else; if you cast it properly, you get a coherent shape, otherwise you get a cloud of pretty mist which tires you out a lot. The wand movements are pretty basic," Harry went on, and shrugged. "The tricky bit is the memory to fuel it with. It has to be _really_ happy, the happier the better."

Eragon raised an eyebrow, and then exchanged another glance with Saphira. "Is that all?"

"Yeah, it's not as easy as it sounds either," Harry said, then shrugged. "But whatever, give it a go."

Eragon grinned, and raised his wand. "Expecto Patronum!"

Predictably, what came out was a white representation of Saphira.

Unfortunately, it came out at full scale of her adult size, and swept through the castle before turning and slowing down, coming back towards them.

"...well, so much for the DA private sessions," Harry muttered. "Wonder if I can get Umbitch to choke by pointing out that this isn't an assemblage of more than three students. By the way, what did you fuel the spell with?"

Saphira took off, flying around inside her virtual self and hooting happily.

"I'm a dragon rider, and Saphira is a bond creature," Eragon answered. "I just used my first bonding with Saphira."

"Yeah, that'd do it," Harry agreed. "Next step, getting hold of a Dementor or two to try it on."

"If this works on the Ra'zac, that would be pretty neat," Eragon said absently. "What now?"

"Well, not much point with the whole message thing until you can get that thing down to smaller than a house." Harry made a frame with his hands, squinting at the patronus. "Can you do it... what, one eighth the size, and we'll see how it looks?"

* * *

><p>9.13<p>

* * *

><p>"Mornin', Stoic," Gobber said, raising a mug. "What's with the bed sheet?"<p>

Stoic gave him a dispassionate look. "I am a Stoic," he said, as if it was self-evident.

"...right, right." Gobber nodded, as if he understood. "Carry on."

* * *

><p>9.14<p>

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><p>F'lar yawned, stretching, and looked out over the Benden bowl.<p>

Then took a second look.

"One, two, three..." he counted off absently, eyes flicking from bronze to bronze. "That can't be right."

Mnementh raised a sleepy head to him. _What is it?_

"There seem to be... well, at least four more bronze dragons than we should have at Benden _in toto_, out there sunning themselves."

F'lar pointed. "Look. I thought there were a few too many dragons, but the bronzes are for certain. Far more than there should be."

Mnementh stood, shook himself, and peered out the ledge. _You are right. Interesting._

His eyes had a momentary spike of yellow, then switched to a happy green-blue. _Ah, I see._

"See what?" F'lar asked, thoroughly confused. "What is it-"

Two dragons, both gleaming bronzes in fine colour, swooped down to land on the ledge.

F'lar watched their approach, and then gaped. "That's-Simanith?"

"Good morning, F'lar," F'lon said, smiling as he climbed down from his dragon. "I'm afraid you've been assigned the High Reaches to search â€" we do need to find a rider for that queen egg, it's only a week or so from hatching."

"Yes, sir," F'lar replied automatically, relying on instinct.

He'd just been noticing the Weyrleader's knots on F'lon's shoulder. And the slightly less intricate knots on the shoulder of the other man â€" the other, very familiar man â€" of a Weyrsecond.

"Don't worry," F'lon added, with a conspiratorial smile. "R'ton assures me that there's not going to be some kind of mad plan to hide the pretty ones again."

R'ton â€" _Robinton_, of course â€" raised a hand like a fencer acknowledging a touch. "I should never have told my father that we were coming. He hates to lose a contralto."

"I'm glad to hear it, sir," F'lar said, then scrabbled for some memory of how F'lessan had interacted with him. "At least this time I won't have to have F'nor look in too many windows."

R'ton chuckled. "He does enough of that already. Oh â€" F'lon," he added, tapping the Weyrleader on the shoulder. "I think I might want to have a word with F'lar before he's sent out. I've visited the High Reaches enough before that I might be able to offer him a few tips."

"Good idea," F'lon agreed, smiling himself at F'lar's quip â€" then his expression turned a little sour. "We need a good Weyrwoman. Jora isn't up to the stress â€" and neither am I, not really. I should step down at some point soon."

"I'm sure you'll still be vigorous... soon," R'ton reassured him. "A strand of silver, in the sky..."

"With heat, all quickens, and all times fly," father and son chorused.

"Quite appropriate, really," F'lon agreed. "Still, the Eye Rock gave no warning this year, we have at least one more."

F'lar calculated in his head. If this really was the time they normally started...

Well, he'd have to discuss it with Robinton â€" ah, R'ton.

"Sorry Simanith and I can't stay, F'lar," F'lon said, turning with a wince of apology. "I've got to assign riders to ride Search over the rest of Pern. I can't imagine where I can sensibly send R'gul..."

"Bitra," R'ton suggested straight away.

"That's cruel," F'lon laughed. "I'll consider it."

* * *

><p>Once he was in the air, F'lar sat back weakly on his bed.<p>

"My father is alive..." he said, slowly.

"He is indeed." R'ton sat next to him. "I'll have to tell everyone else the story of how I Impressed, some day. You know I Awoke only about three days before the hatching, nearly two hundred miles away? Ruathan runner-beasts are in very good odor with me this loop, I can tell you..."

"So... you've been Awake this whole time? Decades?" F'lar remembered the view of Benden â€" lively, bustling Benden â€" and whistled. "Quite a busy few decades, then."

"Oh, by Faranth's first egg, they've been impossibly busy." R'ton looked fondly over at Zair, who returned his gaze with bright blue eyes. "But I've been glad of it. You know we managed to get Southern Weyr colonized as a supply base? And the main reason there's so many more dragons is that F'lon and I have been taking turns kicking Jora up the backside..."

He shrugged. "But â€" well, you're here now, which is a load off my mind. Now, shouldn't you be off on Search soon?"

At F'lar's blank look, R'ton smiled. "Dear me. Ramoth's egg is laid and warming on the sands â€" who exactly do you think you're going to find in Search at Ruatha?"

He motioned F'lar up. "I might have to come with you, though. If she's not Awake, it's going to take a clawhammer to prise her out of Ruatha â€" and if she is Awake, she might react much the same way..."

* * *

><p>Lady Adessa, Lady of Ruatha, was looking for her daughter.<p>

Lessa had always been a sensitive sort â€" both sensitive, to the wants and needs of others, and Sensitive in the way of the Ruathan bloodline. But she was nowhere to be found today, which wasn't usual behaviour for the headstrong young lady who was her youngest daughter. (She'd be more likely to be found berating someone for not doing a good enough job, and then pitching in herself to show how it was done.)

She wasn't in her rooms, which was worrying. She wasn't in any of the places she usually went, nor was she with any of the people she often sought advice from.

Eventually, Adessa got a clue when she heard her daughter's voice, faint over the rushing of the wind.

She couldn't quite make out the words, but it gave her a clue to the location, and she threaded her way through the buildings of the inner Hold to find Lessa just outside the lair of the watch-wher.

"_...crack dust, blackdust, turn in freezing air," _Lessa sang, accompanied by a faint croon from the watchwher. _"Waste dust, spacedust-_"

"Lessa?" Adessa said, climbing the last of the steps. "There you are, dear."

"Mother," Lessa replied, breaking off her song. She reached into the lair and scratched the wher under his chin, earning another croon. "Sorry, I was a little preoccupied."

"I can tell," Adessa informed her, smiling. "How far into the Ballad were you?"

"That was the final chorus." Lessa shrugged. "I _do_ know it all, you know. And Moreta was Ruathan, just like us."

Adessa noticed that Lessa had a few tears in her eyes. She smiled indulgently â€" it seemed Lessa might have had an epiphany over the last few days, then.

Perhaps she might be a little easier to get along with now. Just a little.

* * *

><p>"She was over by the watch-wher's cave, singing to it," she said later to Lord Kale. "I reminded her about her chores, and she's doing them now."<p>

"Well, I'm sure it wasn't much of anything," Kale replied. "The watch-wher probably enjoyed it. Maybe she's just growing into her Power?"

"She could be..." Adessa mused. "That green who flies sweep has been looking at her, I've noticed. Has she said anything about..." Adessa

paused. "Hearing dragons?"

"Not in my hearing," Kale said, after a moment's thought. "That doesn't mean she hasn't been hearing them, of course."

"True, true." Adessa nodded, then switched to a different topic. "Any trouble with the borders?"

"No, none." Kale shot an approving look at the tiny glitter of green which was the sweep rider, making a circuit high above. "Not since Sella caught that scout last year, actually. Maybe Fax has finally learned his lesson."

Adessa snorted. "I'll believe that when watch-whers outfly dragons and the Red Star turns green."

"Doesn't seem likely, does it..." Kale grinned. "Well, maybe he'll have something to occupy him. Lady Gemma â€" you remember, he tried to form a marriage alliance? - she's just had a son, and her family are making noises about Fax needing at least one legitimate heir of some kind."

"Fax, having a legitimate heir. Will wonders never cease?"

"Well, he has to have some kind of plan. You know, apart from trying to hate the Benden weyrleader so much it takes on physical form." Kale's eyes twinkled. "Still, there's always the hope â€" however faint â€" that proper fatherhood will mellow him."

Lord and Lady exchanged a look. Neither of them thought it all that likely that a man who had been caught attempting to invade Crom, Ruatha (twice), Nabol and even Bitra would simply give up because he had an heir.

* * *

><p>That afternoon, dragons came to Ruatha hold.<p>

R'ton was a familiar sight there, as the Weyrsecond dropped in on every hold of Pern at least once a Turn â€" though Ruatha was a particular favorite, and he usually came three times. The wing of extra dragons, however, was not.

Kale looked them up and down. F'lar and F'nor â€" solid lads, sons of the Benden Weyrleader, and recently back from a few years in Southern or so the rumors said. Other browns, blues and greens â€" their wing, spread out over the Inner Hold and approaches.

This kind of display of Weyr power wasn't all that common â€" F'lon preferred to avoid making an issue of the potential might of the Weyr, and so usually sent singlets or small groups for cordial visits. Something had to be up.

"R'ton," he said, smiling. "Good to see you, old friend."

"I enjoy every visit," R'ton replied, matching the smile. Then chuckled. "Except for the time that the sky dropped six feet of snow on us. Poor Zair had to use firestone to tunnel out of his weyr."

"Well, we are a mountain Hold," Kale bantered back. "You've never told me why Zair has such a different name to other dragons."

"Allow a Bronze rider some secrets, Kale," R'ton smiled. "Oh, you know F'lar and F'nor?"

"By reputation, mainly, though I've met them before. Southern agreed with you, it seems," Kale went on, addressing the riders directly. "A most impressive tan. Worthy of a man of Keroon or South Boll. So, what brings so many riders here? Did we short the tithes? Too much green on the heights"

R'ton chuckled. "Of course not, Kale, your account is up to date most satisfactorily. And we saw no verdure when we flew over."

"Search, then," Kale summarized. "I should have known. Nothing else brings in this many riders this side of Thread."

"More right than you know," R'ton murmured. "The Red Star shines in the morning... it can't be all that long. But yes, we ride Search."

"Father?"

Kale turned, seeing Lessa standing uncertainly in the doorway. "Lessa. My youngest daughter," he added in aside to the riders " R'ton knew, but he didn't think the others did.

The younger bronze rider looked... surprisingly apprehensive, actually. Quite surprising, to Kale " surely this wasn't outside his experience?

"Why don't you come over and meet them, dear," he added to Lessa. "These are the sons of Weyrleader F'lon."

Lessa walked over, past her father, and stood in front of F'lar.

"Can I just say something crazy?" she asked.

Kale watched as F'lar's expression went from nervous to bemused to startled, and then relaxed. "Sure," he replied. "I like crazy."

Lessa cleared her throat, and broke into song. "All my life has been a series of doors in my face..."

R'ton had retrieved a gitar from absolutely nowhere that Kale could tell, and started strumming along " and in time, as well. The man could have been Master Harper had it not been for his Impression.

Lord Kale exchanged a look with Adessa, as F'lar began to reply with a piece of sung music of his own that formed a counterpoint to Lessa's piece. Unfortunately for the peace of mind of Ruatha's Holder, his wife had no idea what on Pern was going on either.

Except that, apparently: Lessa had just fallen instantly in love with F'lar, F'lar reciprocated, they were both quite excellent singers,

and love was some kind of open door.

And they finished one another's sandwiches. Whatever they were.

* * *

><p>When the piece wound down, everyone broke into spontaneous applause.<p>

F'nor covered a giggle with his hand. "So, brother," he asked, voice loud in the silence. "I take it we can go home now?"

"I'd say so," F'lar replied. "No point bothering to look any more. Well, except for other potential dragon riders... we've got our weyrwoman, though."

"I'm sorry?" Lord Kale asked. "That's a bit presumptuous, isn't it? I mean--"

"Can I go, father?" Lessa interrupted. "Mnementh and Canth and Zair all say it'll be great fun!"

Kale blinked. "Oh. So you do hear dragons, then."

R'ton laid a hand on the Lord's shoulder. "It's pretty much inevitable at this point, I'm afraid. Don't worry, I'll bring her back if she doesn't Impress."

"And if she does?" Kale asked, frowning.

"Then she will most likely bring herself." R'ton's gitar had vanished as quickly as it appeared, and he made an expansive gesture with his free hand. "They do say Ruatha was a source of great Weyrwomen. Like Moreta â€" though," he added, with a conspiratorial whisper, "I think I've discovered that the Moreta from the ballad may actually be a conflation of two separate Weyrwomen called Moreta."

"Er, good?" Kale was by now completely lost. "Is it?"

"It's certainly interesting. Come on, let's go have some good Benden wine. I've got a skin of the '84 with me â€" quite a good year, all said and done..."

* * *

><p>9.15<p>

* * *

><p>Blinking, Twilight looked up from her book.<p>

At least for once â€" for once! â€" she'd not woken up mid-stride. Pity she was human, though, those usually tended to be the more problematic loops.

And, scanning her loop memories, this was no exception.

Right... that little problem can wait. Now, what's going on?

There was a ceremony in progress... something about summoned familiars.

Twilight looked around surreptitiously, pulled out a PADD, slipped it into her book, and got to text searching as names firmed in her memory.

Her own familiar waved to her, prompting her to check her loop memories again " which distracted her for a moment, since she was fairly sure the normal issue familiar for her here wasn't Saphira... but this was a public place, so there was no chance to double check.

Well, she could get on quite well with Saphira. All things considered, it could have been worse.

* * *

><p>"Kyuui..." Irukuru's head drooped. "Sowwy, Ewagon. Iwukuwu didn't mean to."<p>

Eragon looked at the hole in his roof, and sighed.

"Don't worry. I'll get it fixed."

As he turned for the saw, the blue Rhyme dragon squee'd and glomped him.

A grin stole over the Rider's expression, as he disentangled himself carefully from Irukuru and headed out to chop some new timber.

For some reason, he wasn't at all resentful towards the Replacement for his normal dragon. She was just like an over-excitabile little sister...

* * *

><p>Done._

Twilight closed her book with a quiet twik, and began to pay more attention as the girl she'd identified as the main character stepped up to the podium.

Here was where it would all get interesting...

* * *

><p>Louise swallowed, and began to speak, hoping against hope that for once " for once " she would get the spell right.<p>

"I beg of you" My servant who lives somewhere in the universe! Oh sacred, beautiful and strong familiar spirit! I desire and here I plead from my heart! Answer to my guidance!"

Her wand sparked to life... then there was a loud bang.

In other words, more or less normal for Louise's magic thus far.

* * *

><p>Twilight frowned through the smoke. Something seemed... familiar.<p>

Then she heard a voice. A very familiar voice.

* * *

><p>"Who summons Trixie?"<p>

As the smoke cleared, Louise saw who was speaking.

A moderately sized... blue unicorn.

Louise sat back hard, suddenly filled with euphoria. She'd done it! She'd summoned a familiar! She...

Wait.

Did that unicorn just talk?

And why is it wearing clothes?

The unicorn turned to her with a graceful movement, sending her cloak sweeping out in an impressively billowy arc, and looked her up and down.

"Hm. Trixie supposes you may do."

"Aherm," Mr. Colbert interjected. "Miss Louise, you must complete the binding."

"Oh, right."

* * *

><p>Twilight raised an eyebrow as the binding completed. MjÄ¶Ã°vitnir?<p>

Well, at least it made a little more sense than to have Trixie wielding a sword.

Though, if Derfflinger was going to be free this loop...

* * *

><p>"So." Trixie looked her new... 'master' up and down. (She had her own opinions on who the apprentice was and who the master was). "Your magic is?"<p>

Louise hung her head. "Not very good. Everything I try just makes an explosion."

Trixie stood bolt upright. "And that is __not good__ by the standards of this land? These foals are fools!" Louise actually saw the faint stars gleaming in Trixie's eyes.

Trotting over, Trixie laid a hoof on her shoulder. "Trixie will teach you the number one tenet of her philosophy. There is __nothing__ that cannot be solved with a sufficiently large detonation."

Dubiously, Louise looked at her familiar. "You think so?"

"Trixie has made machines that go into __space__ based solely on how big the explosion inside them is!"

* * *

><p>Twilight blinked as Saphira walked calmly off the stage. The now-a-diamond stage. "I didn't actually know you could do that."<p>

Saphira shrugged, and bent down to whisper. "It took me Loops to work out how to do it consciously."

Sitting back, they watched the final pair of master and familiar come on stage for the talent show.

"Oh," Twilight added, pulling out two pairs of sunglasses. "You might want these. I know Trixie's style."

* * *

><p>The shower of fireworks, explosions, sound effects and even illusions was so complex that it took the faculty almost five minutes to notice that the school was being robbed by a giant rock monster with a mage on top.<p>

Of course, Trixie and Louise noticed at about the same time. And then the golem exploded.

* * *

><p>"...ta-da?" Trixie said, uncertainly, as the bits of rock and earth stopped raining down.<p>

Then, getting back into the groove, she slammed her hooves on the stage. "We hope that you enjoyed the show â€" despite the unexpected intrusion by...?"

"Foquet, the Crumbling Dirt," Louise picked up on the conversation. "It looks like even master thieves can't handle us!"

Trixie laughed. "__That__ was a master thief? Where I come from, master thieves will add locks to doors if they did not consider the locks already there enough of a challenge!"

* * *

><p>Twilight facepalmed.<p>

"What?" Saphira whispered.

"__She's__ the one who did that."

* * *

><p>Trixie walked slowly up the steps, and into the room where Guiche and his girlfriend were.<p>

"You. The herbalist."

Montmorcery looked up.

"Fix this." Trixie gestured back at her apprentice, who was clinging to her right rear leg and muttering something about fuzzy ponies.

"Oh, so __that's__ where the love potion went..." Montmorcery mused. "Sorry, no can do."

"Louise?" Trixie said calmly.

"Yes?" Louise said, looking up.

"It would make me happy if you did that to Montmorcery."

"What are you-aaagh!" THUMP.

Surprisingly, having Louise be __her__ problem instead of Trixie's made Montmorcery very cooperative indeed.

* * *

><p>"Albion are invading!"<p>

"Excellent!" Trixie said loudly. "Twilight, we require your dragon."

Twilight looked over. "For what? I __could__ handle the air fleet by myself, you know..."

"We require... a firing platform." Trixie grinned.

* * *

><p>That day went down in history as the Great Albion Turkey Shoot.<p>

* * *

><p>"...so, to cut a very long story very short," Trixie said, flicking absently at her singed hat, "it was the fault of the king next country over â€" Joseph, I think."<p>

Twilight nodded. "Are you two alright?"

Trixie looked over at Louise. "We had to fight a giant robot. It was interesting."

Louise was still clutching her wand, in a grip that didn't look likely to slacken any time soon.

"I still wonder how Eragon's doing..." Saphira said.

* * *

><p>"Kitty!"<p>

"Please get off me," the werecat leader muttered.

"But you're so fuzzy!" Irukuru enthused.

"I am so sorry," Eragon said, sniggering. "She does this to everyone."

* * *

><p>9.16<p>

* * *

><p>"Well, that went about as well as could be expected," Twilight noted with a sigh.<p>

On the island disappearing behind the __Jack of All Trades__ as it rose into the sky, the volcanic eruption seemed to be __really__ getting going.

"How did you pull this off, exactly?" she added, giving the visitors a look.

"I said I was sorry," Shade Slayer mumbled rebelliously. The blue dragon next to him rolled her eyes.

"Okay," Saphira began, taking a deep breath. "First off, we had a bit of a bad few loops. That's why we wanted this holiday."

"I understand the feeling," Twilight nodded, and her voice softened. "And it was fun, the first week or so. But..."

She pointed back at the volcano. With a muted __whump__, the airship captain engaged superheat, pulling them higher and further from the danger zone.

"Right. This is going to sound ridiculous." Saphira blushed. "You know that brewer pony?"

"Berry Punch, yes," Twilight confirmed. "What of her?"

"She brewed us something which, in her own words, 'had a bit of kick to it'."

Twilight got a sinking feeling.

"We each got a glass, downed them, and then for some reason this twit here decided it might be interesting to see if he could make a volcano erupt."

"__Never__ say __Brisingir__ too loudly," Eragon informed them.

"Why didn't you stop him?" Twilight asked reasonably.

The blue dragon blushed deeper. "I was too busy examining my own claws in minute detail."

"Right." Twilight nodded. "Well, fortunately I managed to teleport us all up to the airship in time â€" well, except Spike and Celestia."

She pointed at the most recently forming pyroclastic flow. Two

shapes, one purple and one white, could be faintly seen atop it.

* * *

><p>"This is fun!" Celestia announced, the sound of rocks on her tungsten-carbide surf board sounding like hail on a roof.<p>

Spike chuckled, his own durasteel board shimmering with magic.

Rarity had made it for him, then shrunk it down with her signature spell so it looked like a handkerchief. (It was always best to be prepared.)

"Uh... hey, Celestia?" he asked suddenly, seeing where they were headed. "What happens when a pyroclastic flow goes over water?"

The alicorn grinned at him, as they reached the shoreline-
-and the cloud of ash kept going.

"Huh." Spike looked down, as it gradually settled out and deposited him on the water itself. "That's kind of cool."

Celestia's hooves began to glow with a water walking effect. She picked her surfboard up, then did a running takeoff. "Come on! I'm going to see if I can hover in the main jet!"

"Sounds cool." Spike spread his own wings and beat steadily at the air. "I guess what ruins one pony's holiday can just mean the most exciting bit for another..."

"Can I have that in writing?" Celestia asked. "It sounds like another good lesson for the archive."

* * *

><p>9.17<p>

* * *

><p>"Do you know," Temeraire said, craning his neck to look at Lawrence, "I do wonder whether we might not interfere with Trafalgar this time."<p>

"Might be an idea, yes." The British Dragoncorps Captain rubbed his chin. "Perhaps, if Admiral Nelson is or feels indebted to us, then he might be more inclined to consider your proposals earlier. And, of course," Lawrence gave a warm smile to his partner, "since he is a kind man, though at times a man who does not suffer fools, it might be that he would consider granting you commission."

"I do enjoy receiving a commissionâ€|" Temeraire mused. "Though not at the cost of an invasion of Britain. Have you had any thoughts on my cousin, might I enquire?"

Lawrence winced. Trying to work out how to head off the situation with Lien was never easy â€" ensuring that her own partner survived was proving harder still than enfranchising dragons, and they could never be remotely sure of either in any given loop.

Then he looked up. "I say, that's unusual."

"What is it?" Temeraire raised his own head, and closed his eyes.
"Yes, I can feel it as well. A kind of faint, singing magic."

"It reminds me of when we had Fallarnon and Mnementh to visit,"
Lawrence said. "I wonder who it is?"

"I hope it is Hiccup and Toothless." Temeraire blinked down at
Lawrence. "It does not feel precisely like Fallarnon and Mnementh,
though perhaps it is instead Twoflower and Ninereeds â€" we have not
seen them in a while."

"Then come along, dear heart," Lawrence said, making the harness
ready for a solo flight. "I am sure they will not begrudge us a day
or two to find out."

* * *

><p>The young Celestial circled over Dover. "It is certainly from
here," he commented to Lawrence, "though I am at a loss to determine
who is not here or who is excess. Can you see anything?"<p>

Lawrence unshipped his telescope. "If you would hover for a moment,
dear one, I might be able to check more closely."

"Of course." Temeraire backwinged, and moved his neck as best he
could to cancel out the movement of his body.

"I say," Lawrence exclaimed, as the telescope revealed something he
could not quite divine from on high. "That's not Lily, in her spot.
It looks to beâ€| well, whatever he or she is, that is a purple
dragon. I think we should examine this more closely."

* * *

><p>A slim young woman of about twenty-two nodded to Lawrence as he
approached the strange dragon. "Good day â€" oh, Captain, I see.
Well, good day to you, Captain."<p>

Lawrence noticed the matching insignia on her shoulders. "And to you,
Captainâ€|?"

"Rarity Harcourt," she replied promptly.

Temeraire could not quite restrain a gasp. "So you are the-"

He pulled himself up at Lawrence's slight gesture.

"Yes, I'm a Looper," Rarity replied quietly. She paused. "I assume
I'm replacing someone you know?"

"My lover," Lawrence answered.

"Well, no fear of my trying to take her place on that score." Rarity
directed a fond look at the dragon lying in Lily's normal spot. "I'm
spoken for, though I expect we'll have to avoid making that too clear
this loop."

"What is his name?" Temeraire asked. "I would ask him, but it seems as though he is asleep."

"I was," the purple replied. "No harm done. I'm Spykoranuvellitar â€" you might be interested to know that this time around, at least, Britain has a flame-using dragon."

"Well, one before Iskierka, that is," Temeraire pointed out.

"Oh, you do normally get another?" Rarity asked. "We're not exactly familiar with this loop â€" I've been running off loop memories since I Awoke here."

"I see." Lawrence thought for a moment, then sat down. "Come on, dear one, it seems we must help a pair of hatchlings through the whirlpool of the Napoleonic Wars."

"Watch it!" Spykoran rumbled, chuckling. "I'm bigger than you two put together."

"For now," Temeraire said quickly, and stuck his tongue out.

"Dear one, I would appreciate it if you would not act like a day-old whelpâ€"|" Lawrence said, smiling broadly and shaking his head.

* * *

><p>9.18 (Gym Quirk)<p>

* * *

><p>The Harper Masters gathered in the otherwise empty voice hall made small talk as the trio before them made final adjustments to their odd collection of instruments. Apprentice Master Morshall was going through his standard litany of what was wrong with everything, not caring that Voice Master Shonagar was clearly not listening to him.<p>

Drum Master Olodkey peered at the large selection of percussion arrayed around young Piemur. In addition to a modest bass drum, there was a snare drum, at least four tuned tom-toms, an array of tuned wooden blocks, and more cymbals than any sane person could possibly need. The youngster was idly twirling a pair of thin drumsticks in his fingers as he waited.

Instrument Master Jerint was focused on the odd guitar Sebell had strapped over his shoulder. It appeared to be made of garishly painted wood - Harper Blue with Fort Hold Yellow highlights - but had no resonance cavity. Instead, there were sets of metallic rectangles under the strings in the area where the sound hole would be; said strings were clearly made of thin wire rather than gut. A few knobs were arranged close to the bridge, and a thick cable of some sort emerged from the body and went into a flat box at his feet and then into a cabinet the size of a large chest.

Composition Master Domick's attention was drawn to the section of the stage where Menolly had set up a perch for her queen firelizard. She also wore a guitar similar to Sebell's, but the longer neck and thicker strings suggested this instrument would play in the bass register. The sounds from the large cabinet behind her as she

experimentally plucked the strings confirmed his supposition.

Master Robinton entered the room and smiled at the performers, who stopped their adjustments and waited for the Masterharper to take his seat.

"This piece was inspired by recent history, specifically the attitude of the Lords Holder before the start of the Pass. I suppose I'd call it something of a cautionary tale," said Sebell as an introduction.

He started playing an almost pastoral tune on his guitar. The melody emerged from the cabinet behind him, somewhat louder than a normal guitar could manage. Menolly's alto began the first verse, also playing a bass accompaniment.

There is unrest with the holders
>There is trouble for the Weyrs
>For the dragons sense a threadfall
>And the Lords ignore their fears

Sebell repeated the initial tune, with Menolly's bass guitar providing an intricate countermelody. The gentle melody came to a quiet close.

Abruptly, Piemur began pounding on the various drums around him: Steady beats on the bass drum with much energetic use of the toms and cymbals. Sebell's repeated strumming modulated into the next verse.

The problem with the holders
>As they see it through their eyes
>They say, "The Weyrs do nothing for us
>We will stop sending the tithes!

"They should stop all of their gaming
>And give help to comon folk."
>But the Weyrs continue training
>And the ancient laws invoke

A descending bass scale led into a reprise of the initial melody, albeit with much more energy from all three performers.

There is unrest 'midst the dragons
>For the tithing trains have ceased
>So the wings are going hungry
>And gray 'rain' comes from the east

A quiet interlude ensued, featuring Beauty crooning a melancholy melody over arpeggios from Sebell and Piemur's patterns on the blocks. Sebell and Piemur indulged in what appeared to be some improvisation based on motifs presented in the earlier verses. Eventually, Menolly resumed her singing.

Well, the holders got their wishes
>And no longer give up tithes
>They just go about their business
>And go living out their lives

Now there's trouble for the planet

>And the folk are filled with dread
>For the Weyrs now lie abandoned
>And the holds...Have gone...To thread.

The final unresolved chord was allowed to just fade out, echoing the unsettling lyrics.

Robinton smiled and went to join the performers on the stage. Domick and Jerint followed him somewhat more cautiously.

Morshall looked as if he had bitten into an unripe redfruit and stalked out of the room.

Shonogar was looking aghast at Menolly, muttering something about abuse of a perfectly serviceable voice.

Olodkey just stared at Piemur's percussion collection, his expression unreadable.

"Do you think we should have gone with 'Threadfall Wizard' or 'Stairway to Benden' instead?" asked Piemur.

* * *

><p>AN:<p>

9.1: Loopholes.

9.2: An oddly small changeling horde, and far too many fire lizards.

9.3: Island to island.

9.4: Throwing tradition out the window.

9.5: Loving one who has been lost. And Beauty's quite the musician herself by now.

9.6: Being a grandmother, or having more children?

9.7: Pretty much business as usual at the Thing.

9.8: F'nor and Canth have precisely one thing each in their respective lives which makes them deathly serious.

9.9: Everyone has their own challenges.

9.10: And everyone has gotten rusty at something.

9.11: He gripes, but it's varied work. He can always have a holiday at Honshu mid-eighth interval.

9.12: Dragon riders have good patroni.

9.13: The Stoic philosophy.

9.14: Early divergence.

9.15: Poor everyone else in Alagaesia.

9.16: Letting off pressure. Magma chamber pressure.

9.17: Lawrence is here, too.

9.18: Thanks to Gym Quirk for providing a musical snip.

10. Chapter 10

Caution: these contain spoilers for the second film.

Note: There are a fair few non-HTTYD loops in this set. This fic will now contain some loops from other dragon-centric settings at times. (Not Spyro, though, that's got its own set.)

* * *

><p>10.1<p>

* * *

><p>"My dear," Robinton began, then sighed. "I am sorry if this sounds terrible-"<p>

"Don't be," Kaisa replied, touching his lips with her finger. "Anything."

"You may have cause to regret that." He swallowed, hard. "What day did Merdine set off on his last voyage?"

Kaisa blinked, shocked. "Robie..."

"Please," Robinton added. "I said it would sound terrible, and it is, I know. But â€" I need to know. I can't explain why."

Kaisa frowned. "It was the fourth day past the equinox, the year before you came to Tillek."

"Thank you. And I'm sorry to remind you." Robinton clasped her hand in his. "Please, though â€" believe me when I say, I needed to know."

His new wife nodded, still looking unsettled. "If you say so, Robie." She forced her expression more cheerful. "Now â€" didn't you say you had a new song?"

"You're right, I did." Robinton reached for his gitar. "It's a song for absent loved ones."

"Absent loved ones," Kaisa repeated, and shifted slightly to be more comfortable. "That sounds like a good kind of song."

* * *

><p>10.2<p>

* * *

><p>Rain broke over the bows of the small schooner.<p>

"Shards..." Merdine hissed through his teeth, watching the next squall coming in towards Nerat Tip. "Just keeps getting nastier..."

The sail boomed ominously. He'd taken in every reef he had, and he'd be running before the wind on bare poles if he could " but that would drive him straight for Nerat, and in this weather the breakers would pound his ship to bits in short order.

A warning crack came from the mast, and he checked his line was tight. Even if she was about to fall apart, his dear _Shadow_ was still better at floating than he was...

The next squall had arrived while he checked the line, and _Shadow_ went nearly out of the water before landing back in the trough between waves with a deafening _bang_.

"Hello the ship!" a voice shouted, faint through the chaos of the storm. Merdine blinked.

"Who said that?" he hollered back, feeling the wind snatch it away from him.

"Just hold on!" the strong baritone replied. "And be ready to grab a net!"

A net?

* * *

><p>Easy, Zair, R'ton instructed, as the bronze beat his wings frenetically against the windstorm. _Just make sure we stay close enough to him._

I will, Zair replied, with simple determination. _The nets make it harder to steer, but I will._

R'ton checked the jury-rigged netting. This would be a _close_ one.

Selling it to S'loner had been easy enough. The Weyr needed to be seen doing something, in these Thread-free days " if it was to have the support it needed when Thread returned " and so R'ton had suggested rescue of ships at sea.

On the other hand, this storm was perhaps a little worse than S'loner had been thinking of. He was used to cold mountain storms, which were nasty enough but didn't have the sheer power of a Nerat hurricane.

Remember, you can 'help' him, he pointed out to Zair. _Just don't make it too obvious._

Of course not, Zair replied, with a brief mental rush of warmth. _What do you take me for, a Brown?_

* * *

><p>Merdine gaped, as the Shadow rose to the top of the next wave and he saw what was unmistakeably a bronze dragon, flying into

the teeth of the wind and seeming to hover there above him.

And " there! There were nets dangling from it!

Merdine wrestled with the tiller, shaping his course as much as he could, then lashed it into place with a line. He waited until the schooner was close to the daring bronze, and then ran as hard as he could for the nets.

* * *

><p>I have him! Zair announced suddenly, and his wingbeats took on a new pattern.

"Good!" R'ton shouted back. "Now..." he cast around for a destination. They were soaked to the skin, and that would mean the trip _Between_ would be freezing. "Take us to the cove!"

Blackness.

* * *

><p>For Robinton, and for Zair, there would only be one Cove.<p>

About twenty degrees south of the Equator, a bronze dragon appeared, cloaked in a thin layer of freezing water.

His rider, likewise covered in cold water, sighed in relief as the warm air of Cove in autumn broke over them.

Their passenger was a little too terrified by his jump Between to properly appreciate the climate.

And his ship, which had come along for the ride, crashed down into tropical waters with a rather final splintering sound.

"Er... Zair?" R'ton said, looking down. "You seem to have got the schooner as well."

Not my fault he was still attached to it, Zair replied quickly.

"Sure it wasn't. Right, at least it's salvaged... and I think we need to get some klah into Merdine as soon as possible." R'ton pulled a vacuum flask from his pocket. "Good thing I brought some."

Zair splashed down into the water not far from the stricken ship, and shed the nets that had saved Merdine.

As he dove from dragonback into the cove and began stroking over to the sailor, R'ton smiled the smile of the virtuous.

Kaisa should be happy, at least, now. Not his wife... but _happy._

And that, really, was as much as anyone could want.

* * *

><p>10.3<p>

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><p>"Grandfather," Jancis said, frowning down at a message slip. "Do you have any idea who sent this?"<p>

Fandarel looked up from his latest project, an improved version of his electric wires. "What's that?"

"This." Jancis put it down on the table, and smoothed it out for her grandfather to read.

"Let's see..." Fandarel put his gloves down, and examined the message slip. "Some kind of poem."

"Yes, I can _see_ that." Jancis shook her head. "I'm kind of wondering _why_ I've got it. And, of course, who'd send it to me."

She read the poem off again, perplexed.

_Ruatha's red
>Harpers are blue
You're smarter than me
>I'd like to meet you

"No idea on my end," Fandarel said, going back to his work. "How was it delivered?"

"Fire lizard," Jancis replied. "Queen one."

"Hm. Most efficient. And, apparently, effective."

Jancis looked over at her grandfather, who shot her a quick smile.

* * *

><p>Lame, Farli opined. _Aren't you supposed to be a harper?_

"Yeah, yeah, not my best work..." Piemur shrugged. "I do better playing than composing."

That wasn't a composition. It barely deserves the title of ditty.
Farli landed on his shoulder, wrapping her tail around his neck. _In fact, perhaps the best way to put it is that, if anyone above the rank of Journeyman saw that, you'd be busted back to Apprentice._

"That's harsh, Farli..." Piemur told her, unfazed. "Do I gain points for delivering it by way of the best gold fire-lizard on Pern?"

Already taken into account. That's why I still assumed you'd be a Harper.

* * *

><p>10.4<p>

* * *

><p>Piemur raced up the steps to the kitchen door.<p>

Even with Beauty cajoling the others, Menolly often had quite a time of it managing her fair at feeding time â€" so, as a matter of course and as a standard routine, he helped her. Even when she was Awake.

Camo helped too, of course. In fact, it was the highlight of his day.

"Hello, Camo," he said, a little breathlessly. "You okay?"

"Yes," Camo replied, nodding and smiling. "Camo feed the pretties?"

Piemur's ears pricked up at that, and his eyes flicked to the small brown fire-lizard perched on Camo's shoulder.

I don't know if it's you helping him, Sandy, he thought, silently. _But if it is â€" thank you._

Sandy's head moved for a moment, looking up at the young harper, and then went back to Camo's cheek where he emitted a calm purr. He, of course, was already full.

Just then, to bossy chirps, nine fire-lizards swept over the Hall rooftops. Both Camo and Piemur were soon fully occupied helping Menolly handle her nine voracious companions â€" swiftly expanded to eleven, when Zair and Kimi fluttered down to join in breakfast.

* * *

><p>"What a day this always turns out to be," Piemur muttered in an aside to Menolly, once the task was done. "My voice has about thirty minutes left in it."

"Lighten up, Piemur!" Menolly told him, flicking her fingers at him. "You're not off to the drum-heights this time!"

"I'm not?" At that, Piemur perked up. "Why so?"

"First off, you're assigned to Jerint for a half-turn. Make yourself something useful." Menolly winked at him. "Of course, you're not supposed to know that, yet, but you're a good enough actor to make your surprise stick. Anyway, after that, you're off for a bit of Nip and Tuck."

"Spy work?" Piemur made a face. "I know spy work."

"I know you do," his friend agreed. "But you haven't â€" yet, at any rate â€" done any _deep_ cover missions. You're for Nabol, my fine fortunate friend."

"Oh, _great_." The apprentice lay back on the floor. "What's my cover going to be?"

"You wait and see."

"Pretties all fed?" Camo asked.

"Yes, that's right, Camo," Menolly told him. "The pretties are all fed."

Camo nodded, frowning hard, and Sandy mimicked him. "_The_ pretties... _are_... all fed," he said, slowly.

Apprentice and Journeywoman exchanged a startled glance.

"That's right, Camo," Menolly said, once she'd recovered a little. "Now, you should go and help Silvina with the rest of the chores."

"Okay." Another frown. "I... go help Silvina."

With that, the drudge turned and headed back into the kitchens, one hand absently on the tail of his brown.

Piemur let out a long exhalation. "Shards, that was unexpected."

"You try doing it with a whole Fair overhead," Menolly replied quietly. "I actually _felt_ Sandy trying to help him."

Rocky muttered something which sounded to Piemur like agreement.

"Oh, that reminds me," Menolly added, and rummaged in a small carisak. She produced a flower-pot, full of soft, warm sand.

Piemur's eyes lit up.

"Beauty double-checked," she told him. "Now, remember â€" try not to make a big deal out of her."

"Never fear," Piemur replied, smiling. "They'll Farli notice her."

Menolly threw a bit of rind at him. "That was _bad_."

* * *

><p>10.5 (Archanon) (Dragon jousters)<p>

* * *

><p>Kiron - though he was called Vetch, here and now, he'd long since stopped thinking of himself as such - looked miserably at the point in the sandpit where an egg was buried. He didn't know what he'd done, but for the first time in this strange loop of life he'd found himself caught in, Coresan had mated with a dragon other than Seftu. Which meant that whatever dragon hatched from the egg wouldn't be Avatre.<p>

It wouldn't be the first life he lived without her, but it would be the first life he lived with a dragon other than the one he had hatched, all those years ago, in a desperate gambit that shouldn't

have worked but had. He'd once had a loop without a dragon at all, preventing the accident that had allowed Avatre's birth by a simple thoughtless comment to Coresan's dragon boy, and he'd been so desperately lonely without her for the rest of that life that he almost hadn't cared when the Magi took over - and he'd almost welcomed the coming of the Nameless Ones, who had ended that loop for him. He'd been careful not to slip again, ever since, but _something_ had gone wrong this loop.

Even if it tore his heart, though, there were things to do and he had friends to make once more, and he couldn't do that without a dragon, so he would simply have to live with the dragon he would receive, even if he _knew_ he'd be unfairly comparing it to Avatre for the rest of this life.

The egg's rocking intensified, a counterpoint to the heavy downpour of the first of the Magi's storms, and Kiron moved forward. Kashet was taken care of, and he knew from experience that he would have privacy today - no one braved this storm to bother him, when he was well-trusted at this point. He mechanically went through with helping the dragonet find its way out of the shell, hammering a breathing-hole with the help of the dragonet inside and continuing to hammer, slowly, helping the hatch with care not to force it to happen too quickly. Eventually, the cracks had spread far enough and the egg split open down the middle, allowing the dragonet within to flop out.

Kiron's breath caught. It was impossible.

"_Avatre,_" he half-whispered, half-sobbed, as the scarlet dragonet looked up at him and made a plaintive sound, and then he was in the sand wallow, helping his dragonet to warm up and dry out after the hatching. Kiron knew his dragon, knew every inch of her, even as a newborn, by now - and this was Avatre, despite the impossibility of it. He didn't have time to wonder, not yet, as a young dragon was a needy dragon. But once the day was over, and he was preparing to go to sleep, he whispered endless prayers to the gods of Altia.

He had his dragon back.

* * *

><p>10.6<p>

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><p>"I see your seven clubs, and raise you an eight," Fishlegs said, putting down a card from his extensive hand.<p>

Hm. Meatlug concentrated, and a card rose gently into the air from her own hand. It plonked down on top of his. _I retaliate with a Skrill._

"Aha!" Fishlegs flipped over two more cards. "Two of my diamonds were secretly Changewings, so your Skrill is ambushed from above!"

Wouldn't work, Blitsif commented idly. _We have spikes._

Fishlegs stared at the card for a moment. "Okay, good to know." He

picked it up, and neatly wrote errata on the info box. "So, my Changewings go splat."

Meatlug chuckled.

"I know." Fishlegs pulled two more cards from his hand. "I've still got a Nine of Cups and The Tower, which means I've got the high ground."

You can keep it. The Gronckle placed another card on her side of the game area. _Whispering death, the whole of Berk now resembles Helveti cheese._

"It's Burgundian at the moment, I think," Fishlegs corrected.

Who'd want burgundy cheese? Meatlug then turned a card over. _Anyway, it's all moot, because my Zippleback formation has been spreading gas into the underground areas for four turns. Now there's air in there-_

"Boom." Fishlegs shook his head, and gathered up the cards. "Good game."

Thank you. Meatlug nodded to him. _What next? Chess?_

"Sounds good." Stowing the cards, Fishlegs got out the chess boards.

Their variant, dragon chess, had three boards. Ground, sky, and â€" between the two â€" flammable.

Also, only one player had the normal chess pieces. The other had a miniature dragon statuette â€" Fishlegs had learned how to make them in Hogwarts once.

Do you want to be dragon or Romans? Meatlug offered.

"Romans," Fishlegs replied. He set out his pieces. "Right, let's see... I'll start off with my Equites to this position."

And I'll burn down the forest. Meatlug tapped the tail of her piece, which promptly incinerated the middle board.

"Oh, come on!" Fishlegs threw up his arms. "Those take time to make!"

Then change the rules. Meatlug stuck her tongue out, chuckling.

"I might, you know," Fishlegs replied.

* * *

><p>10.7<p>

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><p>"Yongxing," Laurence called, one eye and one ear on the two Celestials embroiled in a snarling, snapping fight on the other side of the theatre. "Yongxing â€" please, listen to me. You were a friend to me on our voyage-"<p>

Prince Yongxing's eyes flashed. "I was a friend because I thought you would do the right thing, Laurence! For Lung Teng Xiang to be a fighter â€" a common warrior! It is unjust!"

"Temeraire-" Laurence began, and cursed his choice of name when he saw the Prince's expression. It turned into a wince when Lien managed to bite Temeraire's shoulder, and their bond made phantom pain bleed across into Laurence's shoulder blades.

"Lung Teng Xiang, who I call Temeraire," he started again, and stepped back to maintain the distance between them. A loud explosion reverberated across the whole area, as Temeraire tried to use the Wind but couldn't properly build a resonance. "He and I are partners, yes! It's by his choice!"

Yongxing frowned, glancing over at Lien.

Seeing the opening, Laurence pressed further. "It is no more right that he should be a warrior, than that a dragon in mourning colours should be the companion of the heir to a throne. And yet-"

The British captain had to rush onwards, seeing Yongxing's rage building. "And yet, you have done great things by her side. I only wish to do the same with Temeraire."

"Great things?" Yongxing asked. "Great things, from a warrior? A soldier? A common-born man whose only claim is that he is a skilful killer? Someone who works for the Opium-peddlers?"

Laurence stepped back again, checking once more on the fight between the two dragons. Temeraire had the upper hand, for now, but since he was deliberately not using most of his more interesting abilities it could still go either way.

Which was as it should be. He had to find a way to talk the Prince down.

"Great Britain is my country," Laurence replied to Yongxing. "There is a saying in English â€" my country, right or wrong."

Yongxing snorted.

"If right, to be kept right," Laurence continued. "If wrong, to be set right. Britain does many things wrong â€" very wrong. But I think that, together, Temeraire and I can set her right."

With cautious optimism, Laurence noted that Yongxing seemed to be actually thinking that over. He wasn't just rejecting it out of hand.

"How?" he asked, eventually.

"...I don't know," Laurence admitted. "It won't be easy, I know that. But I think it can be done â€" we are only as we are because we have had a long, long war."

He dared a smile. "I certainly intend to campaign vigorously. Perhaps I may even attain a seat in Parliament, and speak thus to those who make the decisions."

"From what I have seen," Yongxing began, "your Parliament will never--"

"_Laurence!"_

Laurence' head snapped round, and he saw the moment that the abused superstructure of the theatre finally collapsed.

Throwing caution to the winds â€" because he was _damned_ if he was going to fail now â€" Laurence launched himself forward at the Prince, aiming to try and shield the man with his own body.

(If he lived, and the Prince lived, then it would be a start. And if he died â€" oh, well. As they said, well begun was half done.)

The long, slithering, rumbling crash lasted at least ten seconds, which was a good sign.

After it finally slowed from crescendo to halt, Laurence shifted to look â€" first at the Prince, who seemed alive, and then up.

Temeraire's bulk lay just over the two of them, panting heavily.

"Lung Teng Xiang..." Yongxing muttered.

"I am pleased you are both alive," Temeraire said, the calm in his voice underlain with a clear note of great strain. "Do you think you could perhaps get out? It is really a rather beastly weight."

* * *

><p>It still felt strange, to Laurence.<p>

It was, of course, a clever dodge â€" sidestepping the ancient Chinese custom on the appropriate companions for Celestial dragons. But for him â€" William Laurence, third son of the Lord Allendale, to be an adopted Chinese Prince...

Well, suffice to say that there were some things even Looping did not make entirely routine.

On the other hand, there were some things that were a joy to behold, when they happened in the loops. Lien Tien Xiang and Yongxing, jointly congratulating him on his new status (however begrudging the applause, perhaps) was one of them.

It gave one a real sense of achievement. That one was making progress.

I sometimes wish we met years earlier, Laurence commented to Temeraire as he stepped down from the dais. _That way, perhaps we could stabilize France as a Republic and stop this whole sorry mess from happening._

I agree, Temeraire replied softly. _But then â€" well, who can say._

Not I, dear heart.

* * *

><p>Dear Yongxing (who I will not do the embarrassment of calling brother),

I have good news, regarding our mutual project. This Thursday last, the twelfth day of March Eighteen Hundred and Twelve, Temeraire and I jointly addressed the House of Commons on the matter of Opiate smuggling.

Based on your own efforts, I was able to strongly imply that a cessation of this trade would result in a partial opening of the Chinese market " specifically, to those woven cotton goods we have previously discussed, and to the machinery to improve Chinese manufacturing.

The concession of five points on the price of Tea went down most well. As you know, tea is the thing which Britain most wants from China, and to be able to sell that much tea at even a slight additional profit was more than enough to sway a crucial Interest in Trade to our side of the Issue. As such, the Act has made further progress and is to be read one last time in the Lords on Wednesday next.

My apologies for filling most of this letter with business matters.

On the issue of our own welfare, Temeraire is very much healthy. He and I look forward to a future visit to his family, perhaps in the next year. I myself have had a minor head cold, but this has passed in the last few days.

On the issue of warfare, things continue well for Britain. In particular, and also furthering our project, Lily has been promoted to a rank of Major in her own right and is in charge of all aerial aspects of the War in Spain. A major achievement, if I might be so bold.

Be sure to write me if any further issues come up.

Your unexpected brother,

Lao-ren-tze.

* * *

><p>"What do you think?" Laurence asked, holding it up.<p>

"It looks fine," Temeraire replied, after scanning through it. "Perhaps a little unpolished, but then you are that sort of man."

Laurence concealed a smile.

"If I may," Temeraire continued. "I should like to write my cousin. It is an unusual thing, to not have her opposed to us."

"It is," Laurence agreed. "Shall I take down what you

say?"

"Please," Temeraire requested. "I do so dislike those speech-to-text programs or whatever they are called. They have no flair."

Laurence pulled out a fresh sheet of paper, and readied his biro.

He had a penchant for sticking to the technologies and abilities of his home loop. He was also, however, knowingly hypocritical about some of them.

Which was why he had the biro, and why he had a ream of perfectly smooth, white A-4 in his pocket, and also why his correspondence with Yongxing had a turnaround time of about two days each way.

The Prince didn't ask, and Laurence said nothing.

* * *

><p>10.8<p>

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><p>"Have you been trying to find something useful at Fort again?" R'gul asked, looking down severely at the Wingleader hoisting bags down from his dragon. "There's nothing _there_, F'lar."

"I beg to differ." F'lar unstrapped the last of the carisaks, and laid it on the table. Carefully, he pulled out a slim rectangle of shiny black material, and placed it in the warm light of Benden high summer.

Next came a second rectangle, which went next to the first, and a long, thick cord of something that did not look like fabric.

R'gul watched in bafflement as F'lar connected the rectangles with the cord, then pulled out a spindly contraption made out of... metal wire?

Another of the cords connected the contraption to the second rectangle, and then F'lar aligned it carefully on something R'gul couldn't see.

Then he pulled the second rectangle open, as though it were a clothes-press, and pressed parts of it in a pattern.

It lit up.

A cool female voice came from nowhere. **Connection established.**

"Good morning, AIVAS!" F'lar said cheerfully.

"I see you have managed to set up the portable data link via satellite four, Wingleader F'lar," the rectangle replied, this time in a deep male voice full of character. "Excellent. It is fortunate that the equipment was in the stores at Fort â€" my records did not indicate such."

F'lar nodded. "Oh â€" this is Weyrleader R'gul," he added, waving to

the frankly shocked bronze rider. "Please tell him what you told me."

"Certainly." The voice paused for a moment. "Weyrleader R'gul, you should know that the wandering planet you know as the Red Star is approaching rapidly. It will be within range for a Pass the year after next."

"...what?" R'gul asked, blinking. "F'lar, why is there a rectangle talking at me?"

"I found a map at Fort, which led me to the Southern Continent," F'lar not-explained glibly. "I found AIVAS there, and spent a few months uncovering him."

"But..." R'gul waved a hand at the sky. "You only left this morning..."

Dragons can time travel, Mnementh informed him blandly. _Keep up._

"Weyrleader R'gul," AIVAS continued, a note of admonition in his voice. "Your confusion is understandable but not particularly flattering. Wingleader F'lar informs me that no preparations have been made for the forthcoming Pass. This is highly concerning."

* * *

><p>We should really start charging for this kind of thing, Jaxom commented, as Ruth carefully lifted the vacuum-packed satellite. _I mean, if F'lar is going to make this kind of use of us._

Perhaps, Ruth replied, taking the weight. _Mind you, that film of R'gul trying to decide whether to be chastened, offended or weirded out by being scolded by a rectangle_ is_ hilarious._

They vanished to the past.

* * *

><p>10.9 (Archanon) (Dragon Jousters)<p>

* * *

><p>Kiron awoke to yet another round of his life and found himself bemused. This was not Tia. Nor was it Alta, where he'd awoken in one life as, essentially, an Altan version of Ari (and hadn't that been strange). But â€" his gaze fastened on the familiar. The hot sand he stood on, and dragons all around, and eggs.<p>

Kiron didn't have the memories from this life yet, though if they worked like his life as Ari-of-Alta they'd trickle into his mind over the next few days, but he knew with a gut-deep certainty that these eggs, unfamiliarly colored as they were, were going to hatch any moment now. And he, Kiron, was _going_ to obtain a dragon for his very own.

The others began to move forward and Kiron followed, only to realize as he stepped forward that he had no idea how he'd find Avatre in

here. He forcibly tamped down a panicked thought wondering if Avatre would even be here, reassuring himself that he'd found her in far stranger places before (including, once, traded to him by a Bedu who had sought him at his parent's farm, and how her egg had been kept warm enough he'd never know). He felt the deep, vibrating humming of the dragons down to his bones as eggs hatched, left and right, dragonet after dragonet passing him by and claiming their riders (and wasn't that different) until, in front of him, an egg split open and â€œ

Jewel bright eyes, deep and vast as anything he'd ever known, and the knowledge written on his soul that he would never, ever be alone again.

Kiron had eyes for nothing but the scarlet dragonet, entirely oblivious to the mutters about his dragon's odd color and the looks the Weyrleaders of Benden were exchanging at the moment.

K'ron. Now no one can ever keep me from you again.

Avatre... I'm glad.

* * *

><p>10.10<p>

* * *

><p>"Queens don't fly," R'gul stated.<p>

"Except to mate," S'lel added.

Wingleader and Weyrleader exchanged a mutually exasperated look.

"I see," Lessa said sweetly. "Fine. I just have a few more questions."

R'gul indicated she should continue.

"First off â€œ Weyrwoman Moreta." Lessa's smile went from saccharine to strychnine. "If Moreta â€œ who was Ruathan, as am I â€œ was a Weyrwoman, what kind of dragon did she have?"

The Weyrleader frowned. "A queen dragon, of course."

"Then, during her famous Ride, what â€œ exactly â€œ was she riding?"

R'gul didn't answer.

"A runner-beast?" S'lel suggested. "Ruatha has excellent-"

He saw the glare of his Weyrleader, and wisely shut up.

"So, queens sometimes fly â€œ in times of disease and plague." Lessa nodded to herself. "Good, that's one thing sorted. The second -"

She whistled three pure notes.

F'nor came into her weyr, sketching a salute, with three other riders

from his wing. "Got the tapestry you asked for, Weyrwoman."

"Good. Thank you, F'nor. Did you have to hurt Lord Meron?"

"I didn't," F'nor replied, stressing the pronoun.

"Wingsecond F'nor!" R'gul rapped out. "What is the meaning of--"

"I asked him to go retrieve my rightful property -- property of Ruatha Hold, and of the line of Lord Kale of Ruatha," Lessa informed him. "Canth has informed me that no-one came to any great harm -- just a few bruises and one case of frostnip. Just over there, above Ramoth, will be fine."

The brownrider, two blueriders, and one greenrider carefully hung the tapestry onto hooks that were already there, taking great pains to get it properly straight, and even greater pains to avoid disturbing the napping gold dragon.

"Lovely," Lessa pronounced. "Oh, look, flying Queens!"

R'gul stood. "This has gone on long enough, Weyrwoman! You are to follow custom in this matter--"

A hide landed with a slap on the low table.

"Records of when Weyrwoman Carola took Feyrith to visit a gather held in her honour in Lemos." Lessa's smile was now only 'sweet' in comparison to the platonic ideal of savoury. "Any further objections, Weyrleader R'gul, who thinks custom is anything he's done twice?"

She stood, and the Power in that small frame silenced whatever R'gul was going to say. "R'gul. You worship custom without understanding it. Your position is that the Weyr should follow custom in all things -- where custom is to receive no tithes, to deny the possibility of Threadfall, and to do whole-heartedly whatever the sloth and ineptitude of my predecessor forced upon your predecessor. And now, you try to deny the reality of things you have seen with your own eyes... Rangul."

Ramoth rose fluidly from her slumber, and Lessa walked over to her. "But -- well. You deny custom in these matters, and I will deny custom myself. In the words of a wise man, I'm going to build my own Weyr. With blackjack, and harpers."

In one motion, Lessa leapt aside Ramoth, who jumped about six inches into the air and vanished.

* * *

><p>"...you did what?" F'lar asked, once he'd stopped laughing.

"I was only going to show him the tapestry, dear," Lessa replied, as the sun of a Southern summer beat down upon both of them. "But... well, I got a little too angry."

"I did wonder why you asked us to meet you here," F'lar mused, gauging Honshu with his hands in a rectangle shape. "Especially a

hundred years in the past."

"The way I see it," Lessa said, stretching sinuously, "is that we can hang out around here for about ten years, jump the clutches forwards by relays as soon as they're laid, and then run one really big Search across all of Pern â€" just the three of us â€" for the whole month after I walked out until the eggs hatch. Then, Southern suddenly has a quorum of dragonriders."

"And the blackjack and harpers?"

"F'nor has decks of cards all over his pocket, and Ramoth checked in on Robinton â€" he's game, and he'll bring Sebell."

They watched as Ramoth, Mnementh and Canth played in the river.

"Remind them to watch out for felines," F'lar muttered.

"They're not idiots," Lessa replied, eyes shadowed for a moment. "They remember what happened to Golanth."

Something went _splat_ against a cliff face.

Four points! Canth bragged.

"And," Lessa added, in a rather different tone, "they seem to be playing darts with them."

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><p>10.11:<p>

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><p>Mirrim drew several stares as she walked into the main cavern.<p>

"Morning!" she said brightly, walking over to Manora. "Oh, can my new fire-lizard stay? She's as well behaved as the others are."

Manora eyed the girl.

Reppa, Lok and Tolly were orbiting overhead, with quiet chirrups, and the newcomer was perched on Mirrim's arm.

Somehow.

"Mirrim..." Manora began, as gently as possible. "That's not a fire lizard."

Yes I am! Path insisted. _Could a dragon perch on someone's arm? I think not._

"But we all _saw_ you impress a dragon!" someone else burst out.

"Really?" Mirrim asked, looking up at Path. The green shrugged. "Well, girls only ever ride gold dragons. This isn't a gold dragon, so therefore it must be a fire lizard. Logic."

Path nodded.

Mirrim shrugged. "But if it's a problem, then she can perch somewhere else. Off you go."

Path exerted her telekinesis as she had been for the last few minutes, making it seem as though Mirrim was throwing her into the air like a normal fire-lizard, and then flew daintily over to a cart handle.

Keeping her apparent weight small, she settled down on it, and Reppa, Lok and Tolly alighted on her tail.

While that had been going on, Mirrim took out a knife. "Shall I do the redfruit today, Menora?"

"Er... sure," Menora replied, still looking a bit baffled.

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><p>10.12<p>

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><p>"...oh, brilliant."

It's not so bad, Mnementh commented. _Not compared to what might have happened._

"Yeah, but being a character in a children's TV show?" F'lar sighed.

"You know, technically, the Equestrians are from a world that's a children's TV show," Jaxom said from the floor. "At least you're closer to your teen years than me â€" I get this pretty much every loop, and I'm sick of it."

I find this actually quite interesting, Ruth said.

"Did you two plan this?" F'lar asked, accusingly.

"Not at all," Jaxom denied, and both dragons nodded along. "No, just met myself coming the other way. Twice at the same time, and ended up in a heap with me, myself and I. After that, the whole thing collapsed."

F'lar winced. "Where?"

"That would be those jobs I had at the open flight at Ista." Jaxom ticked them off. "I had to interfere with T'ron attempting to kill his bronze by flying it to death, make sure Robinton didn't die, get Oldive there faster than normal because he _did_ get there faster than normal, get Prideth out of the way because Kylara left her too close _again_, and incidentally make sure you had a knife, because you forgot to pick one up when you came to the flight."

The once and future Ruathan Lord gave F'lar a look. "You're really starting to take me for granted, you know. Our loop is resilient, but not _that_ resilient."

"Okay, point taken." F'lar shook his head, then clapped his paw-claws together. "Right. I'll try to remember that. Now â€" where the fardles are we?"

I watched this once, Ruth contributed. _Kind of bizarre, really. Of course dragons have tails._

"That's _tales_, Ruth," Jaxom said. "Oh, shards, I just realized Sharra's going to be my _twin_ in this."

Mnementh sat down. _Try just sleeping the loop out, like I'm going to. This may not be Eiken, but it's hardly stimulating._

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><p>10.13<p>

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><p>"Okay, guys," Hiccup began. "I know this is going to be kind of stressful, for most of you."<p>

You're telling us, Barf muttered. Belch nodded agreement.

"How are you guys handling the Dark type, by the way?" Hiccup added. "It does have some neat side effects."

Like? Belch invited.

"You find it easier to beat up Ghosts. And yes, that _is_ a concern around here."

The dragon master of the Elite Four shrugged. "So your job in my team is probably going to be just beating up ghosts, it's easier than having someone else do it."

I can get behind that.

"Right, that's Barf and Belch. Stormfly?"

What on earth am I? Stormfly asked plaintively.

"Druddigon." Hiccup waited for her to pull a face. "Yes, I know you knew that. Just... stay warm, okay? Ask for help if you cool off, because according to this encyclopedia that _may_ result in your freezing solid."

Ouch. Stormfly shivered.

Is it my go yet? A shiny Charizard asked.

"Nope." Hiccup waved a hand. "Next... what about you, Hookfang?"

I am covered in spikes and appear to be some kind of flying land dragon shark. Hookfang shrugged, his wicked wing-claws flexing. _I feel fine._

"Good to know you've adapted... just watch out for ice. Actually, that goes for most of you. Other dragons, ice, and fairies." Hiccup

counted off the dragons he'd done so far. "Thornado?"

I am the night.

No you're not, Blitsif muttered. _You're just a bat with a subwoofer for a head. Incidentally, how the heck am I a dragon? I'm a sheep._

Hiccup rummaged in his pack. "I seem to remember there was... something... aha!"

He threw a grey-red-yellow sphere at Blitsif, who caught it in one hoof with a puzzled frown.

Then she flashed a brilliant yellow colour.

"Ta-da," Hiccup said gravely.

Not really much change, Blitsif said, looking herself over again.

"I assure you, you are technically a dragon now." Hiccup shrugged. "Now, the only question is whether Lazy-

Shorty, Toothless corrected.

"Wow, another name change?" Hiccup shook his head. "Okay, whether _Shorty_ and Meatlug are around. I expect at least one of them to be a Salamence."

And the other? Stormfly asked, miffed.

"Dragonite, probably. Though I'm still hoping for one of them to be a Dragalge, because otherwise the whole team could be beaten up by fairies..."

Toothless landed in front of him. _What about me?_

"Okay, yes, fine." Hiccup scratched him. "You're a huge black Pok  mon of doom that spits blue fire from the sides of his mouth when you're holding a marble. Truly you are the rock on which my team is founded."

So long as you accept that.

"Glad we could get that sorted out. You and Blitz can fight over who gets to use a marble." Hiccup stood, and stretched. "Okay, as I understand it our job is basically to make damn sure no-one gets past this stage of the Pok  mon league."

Should be easy, Thornado said, to general agreement.

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><p>10.10 continued<p>

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><p>"R'gul, this is a disaster," S'lel said forcefully. "We haven't been able to find Lessa   " or Ramoth   " anywhere."

"And F'lar hasn't shown up in days," K'net added. "Nor has his brother. And I think a couple of the girls from the cavern have vanished as well."

"With that many..." R'gul frowned, then shook his head. "No, it can't be possible. She has to be somewhere, probably with that interfering F'lar."

"Perhaps she has some kind of attachment?" S'lel asked. "He did discover her."

R'gul rubbed his eyes tiredly. "You checked the other Weyrs?"

"Yes, all five. S'lel took Igen and Ista, and I sent T'bor to check High Reaches and Fort. No luck there, or at Telgar." M'tal shrugged. "What about Ruatha? She could be at-"

"That's the first place I looked," K'net cut in. "No sign, and Ramoth's too big to fit inside."

"What about..." S'lel frowned. "There was a comment someone made at Ista Hold â€" I stopped off there for lunch â€" that was asking why so many dragons were around lately."

R'gul gave a severe look. "I said we were to avoid imposing on the holds, S'lel."

K'net stood, pushing his chair back. "Damn you, R'gul! What else are we supposed to do for food? F'lar had the right of it-"

"K'net!" M'tal cut in before R'gul managed to, and glared at the younger bronzerider. "He is your Weyrleader, and you will show him respect!"

K'net scowled, but subsided.

"R'gul, one of my blue boys is from Ista hold," S'lel said patiently. "We visited his family, they gave us a meal, and our dragons had no need to eat. Nice fish, too... wish Ista would tithe one of these turns."

R'gul pinched his nose again.

"This is getting us nowhere," K'net declared. "We have no queen dragon, Thread is coming-"

"Thread is not coming," R'gul interrupted. "Thread has not fallen for four hundred turns. It will not return."

"Did you even listen to C'gan's songs when you taught Lessa?" K'net asked. "By the Egg, this is too much... I've already issued the orders to the weyrleader. Fortunately, they haven't started firestone drill yet, so those four greens we have are still fertile."

"What are you implying?" M'tal asked, warily.

"We've got no queen dragon, so greens will have to do-"

That was as far as K'net got before the shouting started.

* * *

><p>"Don't worry, you'll be fine," Lessa said kindly, as the two teens from Keogh Hold clambered off Ramoth.<p>

"This way!" Robinton called, waving them into the bustling kitchen area. "Everything all right, Lessa?"

"Shells, but I'm tired." Lessa smiled, her teeth white against a well-tanned face. "Only three more Holds on my list, though."

"You'd better get a move on, then," Robinton told her. "I know you've been timing it while on Search, sleeping in the past so you can use as much as you can--"

"Without getting timesick," Lessa completed. "Feels like a longer and more complicated version of Moreta's Ride."

You're better than Moreta was, Ramoth stated. Then, for pedantic correctness, added, _Both Moretas._

Mnemenh burst into the air overhead, and came smoothly down to deliver his own cargo of candidates. A boy and a girl, this time, and a quick inquiry from Lessa placed them as being from Nabol.

"Anyway," Robinton went on, glancing back over the overworked Brekke and Silvina, along with the other help â€" including about half the Lilencamp Traders, hired for the task â€" who were turning the bare bowl of Southern into a camp for an increasing number of potentials. "By my reckoning, if you got the timing on all those transferred clutches right then they're going to hatch tomorrow afternoon."

"Three holds, twenty hours... should be time enough." Lessa consulted her list. "Three Rivers... well, that's distinctive enough. On we go, dear one."

On we go indeed. Ramoth took off, wings pumping.

Once they were about a length from the ground, Lessa formed an image of the triple-tributary which gave the Three Rivers holding its name.

"Let's go, Ramoth!" Lessa cried.

You only needed to ask.

* * *

><p>"Well, that's done," Lessa said, looking down with a smile at the huge hatching ground of Southern.<p>

"Quite a sight, isn't it?" F'lar agreed, one arm around her shoulder.

There were relatively few spectators â€" it had been hard enough to run Weyr Search at all with just three dragons, even three extremely

sensitive ones, and collecting all the families would have been logistically impossible â€" but the Lilencamp caravan provided a token audience.

More importantly, though, were the potentials â€" and the eggs they were to Impress.

Ramoth had risen no fewer than fourteen times over the course of their decade in the past. Each clutch had been timed forward in careful ten-turn relays, and deposited at Southern on the same day of spring â€" with just enough extra time on the clock for earlier clutches that they should hatch all at the same time.

All four hundred and ninety-three of them, including seven queen eggs.

To allow for draconic choice, they'd somehow managed to dredge up six hundred and eleven potential riders from their whirlwind month of Search. About forty percent were girls, as well â€" _this_ Weyr had no ridiculous rules about only men riding fighting dragons.

Canth had quickly identified which egg contained Wirenth the previous day, and F'nor had contrived to have Brekke in the right place to make an Impression easy.

As the couple looked out over their handiwork, Robinton climbed the steps towards them.

"I wish you'd given me more warning, Lessa," he said then. "I had to use all my considerable talents to write a catchy ditty about what to do on the hatching sands."

"Haven't you already written about ten of them?" F'lar asked, releasing Lessa and wagging a finger under the Masterharper's nose. "I mean, it's not as if it's something you've never encountered before."

"But it was so hard to _choose_, " Robinton stressed. "That's what I'd have preferred more time for."

Any further conversation was cut off, as Ramoth bespoke them all. _It is time._

And then, in harmony with Mnementh and Canth, they began to hum.

All talk stopped across the impromptu Weyr as the three largest dragons of their colour in Pernese history crooned into the early evening light â€" signalling the largest single _hatching_ in Pernese history.

* * *

><p>"I have never felt so overworked," F'nor said, three days after the hatching. Sinking into the chair at his table, he began eating with a ravenous single-mindedness. "Never."<p>

F'lar shrugged, having already taken the edge off his own hunger. "Count yourself lucky we managed to retain the services of the Lilencamp traders â€" and that Robinton was able to bring in a dozen free Harpers to help train everyone. Otherwise we'd be _completely_

overwhelmed."

"We're not overwhelmed now?" F'nor resumed inhaling food.

"You don't have to give educational talks to an entire Weyr's worth of dragons at once," Lessa replied, rubbing her forehead. "The hardest thing's the food, though. The traders are hugely helpful on that front â€" especially since about four of their young ones Impressed â€" but we've nearly used up our stockpiled herds already. I give it another three or four days before we need more."

F'lar passed a tumbler of redfruit juice to his brother, who drained it in one go. "You're right, more hands â€" experienced hands â€" are needed. Particularly..."

He paused.

"Hold on, I'm going to ask Ramoth to inquire â€" discreetly â€" about the rest of my wing. And C'gan, as well."

"That should make it merely hard," F'nor agreed. He polished off the last of a loaf of bread. "Brekke's doing well with Wirenth, by the way â€" that's one silver lining."

"Gold lining?" F'lar asked innocently, and both the others gave him a dirty look.

* * *

><p>"Well?" R'gul asked, near tonelessly.<p>

"Four." K'net's voice was full of disgust. "And if they're like the other clutches, only greens and blues."

"Still..." S'lel tried to inject optimism into the meeting. "That will bring us up to a strength of two hundred and twenty â€" more than we had when..."

The attempt fell flat.

"We need to do something, R'gul!" K'net insisted. "Shards, as it is we're reduced to fishing to feed the Weyr â€" and the Eye Rock has bracketed the Star Stone-"

"There is not going to be a pass," R'gul said simply. "I have asked Hath to bespeak Ramoth, or to find where the rest of F'lar's wing went when they vanished, but â€" nothing. He says he cannot, and that trying gives him a headache. What more should I do?"

K'net sat back, wincing as he rubbed a recent scar. "Almost anything. By the Egg, doing something would be an improvement. Since when have we been required to work for what should be given freely?"

R'gul turned, roused out of his depression. "K'net, you bring this up every time we-"

He fell silent, as did all the other bronze riders. Listening to their dragons.

* * *

><p>"Greetings, Weyrleader R'gul," F'lar said pleasantly, adjusting the rank knots on his own shoulder with a seemingly casual air.<p>

Lessa stood beside him, one arm around his waist. She was also, visibly, closer to thirty than twenty.

Behind them, hundreds upon hundreds of young dragons settled to the rim of Benden Weyr. Including no fewer than six queen dragons.

"We left a few dozen riders back at the Weyr to keep things ticking over," F'lar added, indicating the display of numbers behind him. "My brother and his weyrmate, for example â€" strangest thing, a brown flying a gold... anyway," he went on. "We're around if you need us."

"...but..." R'gul tried, mouth agape.

"Particularly if you have problems with Thread," F'lar added, with a winning smile. "It fell over Big Island and Paradise River yesterday â€" we got it, don't worry."

"...how..." R'gul said this time. It wasn't much more coherent.

"Ramoth has big clutches," Lessa said glibly.

She wasn't really being fair to the poor man... given when she'd left, back when Ramoth was only a turn old, there'd been â€" technically â€" _just_ enough time for a clutch laid within days of her leaving to reach the point her daughters rose for mating flights of their own.

Which was the point, after all.

"Why are you suddenly so _old?_" K'net burst out.

"We have our ways," F'lar replied "It's the lovely sea air around our new Weyr."

"I think it's the blackjack games," Lessa said, one finger on her chin as she pondered. "F'nor is such a card sharp, it's put turns on me."

"No, it'll be the songs." F'lar snapped his fingers. "Must be. Robinton was saying-"

"The Master Harper?" T'bor interrupted. "So _that's_ where he keeps disappearing to for months at a time."

"Exactly." Lessa beamed. "He's such a nice man. Hears dragons, you know."

"S'lel," F'lar added, raising his voice. "You might want to get your Weyrleader a drink. He seems a little overwhelmed."

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><p>10.14 (Gym Quirk)<p>

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><p>Lessa Awoke cold. Cold with more than the chill of the everlastingly clammy stone walls. Cold with the awareness that Ramoth was not with her. She fought down the despair to conduct her start-of-loop routine.<p>

Baseline start by all appearances, she concluded after noting the cheeseroom and the other sleeping lumps of Ruathan drudges. _Good. Ramoth will hatch in five days and we'll be fine._ It had taken more iterations than she cared to think about to be able to function properly after a loop start without her beloved queen dragon.

There was the usual morning premonition that accompanied nearly every standard loop start. _A little fainter than usual. I guess I only timed it here once._

Four pings in rapid succession registered in her awareness. She returned the courtesy.

Lessa? It was Mnementh, of course.

Hello, she replied. _Just you two plus F'nor and Canth?_

So it would appear. Things are looking pretty standard. We'll need to play nice with Fax and touch base with Lytol today, but we should be able to get to you day after tomorrow as usual.

Lessa sighed. Experience had shown her that pushing events too hard tended to make for large unpredictable messes. F'lar needed the High Reaches Lord's permission to Search so as not to get R'gul's knickers in a twist, and she needed to engineer Fax's renunciation of Ruatha to set things up for Jaxom; leaving the succession uncertain tended to result in armed clashes between Groghe of Fort and Nessel of Crom over the territory, which was undesirable to put it mildly.

So she'd have to be patient and allow time for things to play out. Well, she spent ten turns plotting her revenge against her family's murderer in the baseline. Patience was a well-honed tool.

Shells, she missed Ramoth.

* * *

><p>"Aye, renounce it, in favour of her issue, if it is male â€| and lives!" crowed Fax with raucous laughter as Lady Gemma gasped and clutched at her gravid belly.<p>

"Heard and witnessed!" responded F'lar, quickly echoed by the other dragonriders.

Goaded the self-styled Lord of Seven Holds into renouncing his claim on Ruatha was depressingly easy, mused Lessa.

Particularly when he was up against a coordinated team of three loopers with access to an assortment of mind manipulation techniques.

F'lar looked to be experimenting with some sort of Glib Speech magic. F'nor seemed satisfied to stick with jedi mind tricks this time.

In the confusion surrounding Lady Gemma's sudden labor, Lessa insinuated herself into her entourage to be in a position to supply much-needed obstetric assistance. Having Gemma around as Jaxom's Regent (with Lytol's proven administrative skills to assist) was usually a positive thing. And it assuaged her guilt at having been indirectly responsible for the lady's death.

Also, being able to focus on an immediate problem helped her to not think about Ramoth.

* * *

><p>"The child is male," declared Lessa. Mnementh, tell F'lar and F'nor I'll handle Fax this time. Just keep his goons off my back.

The High Reaches Lord bellowed denials and charged toward the small figure at the base of the stairs, cocking a fist back to smash.

Lessa stood her ground until the last moment, slipping aside and tripping the larger man, sending him sprawling on the stone steps.

She walked toward one of the tables as Fax slowly stood, shaking his left hand and wincing. _Possible wrist sprain trying to catch himself. I guess a break would be too much to ask for._ Her peripheral vision picked up the dragonmen positioning themselves near Fax's guard contingent to cut off interference from that quarter.

Fax's face contorted into a rictus of pure rage and he charged headlong toward the future Weyrwoman. _Oops. Wasn't expecting him to get that mad this soon._ Lessa called on the training she had acquired from that odd little man from Oi Dong and watched the world around her slow. She carefully rolled under the table before allowing her personal time to return to normal. She continued to back away as the table edge caught her pursuer in the stomach.

Chair, she pushed into Fax's mind, and the Lord obliged by picking up a nearby chair and hurling it at her. She dodged the rickety piece of furniture and heard it splinter on the wall behind her.

Good enough. She pulled a pair of short clubs from her subspace pocket as she crouched near the remains of the chair for a moment, watching Fax stalk around the table toward her. The clubs were heftier and sturdier than the chair legs she had pretended to pick up. _Ah. So he did pick up that carving knife while he was at the table._

Recalling the close combat skills learned from Xena and the Amazons, she focused her attention on Fax's knife hand. _At least his off-hand is impaired, so he probably won't try anything fancy with it._

He launched an overhand slashing attack. Her left club rotated to meet the descending wrist with a solid thunk, sending the blade flying past her shoulder. Whirling out of the way, she managed a

strike with her right-hand club just below his left shoulder blade, propelling him into the wall with a heavy thud and an agonized cry that quickly faded. The former Lord of the High Reaches fell backwards with the knife buried in his chest.

Wait. There's no way...Canth! Did F'nor...?

He extends his apologies, but says the setup was too good to waste, relayed the brown dragon. Lessa could picture it easily enough, use some form of telekinesis to brace the knife against the wall at the proper height and allow the victim to charge right onto the point. There would be no problem diverting the onlookers into believing it was a fluke of how the man had fallen.

She shot a glare at the brown rider, who looked back impassively.

F'lar took the opportunity to break in. "I hope there are no objections to Gemma's son taking hold here. I would suggest she serve as his Regent until he comes of age," he said as he walked over to Lessa to join her in looking at the body.

Lessa took a deep breath. Even after all the loops, a small part of her wanted to push her own claim, but was quickly fought down with the thought that she needed to be available for Ramoth.

The Hold Steward dithered over. "And what of this drudge, my lord?"

"Her? I claim her for Search. She is no longer your concern," came F'lar's no-nonsense response.

"Took you long enough," she murmured. "Can we go yet? I need a bath."

"Just the standard odds and ends to get everyone's story straight. Why don't you go outside and say hello to the dragons?"

She nodded and made her way to the entrance, tucking the clubs back into her pocket.

* * *

><p>Lessa was still attending to the aged watch-wher in the kennel when F'lar and F'nor emerged into the courtyard. It was a small thing, but the baseline death of the creature had affected her, and she made an effort to ease her departure from the Hold when possible as a minor penance.<p>

She listened to the wingleader make the usual dispositions of the dragons and riders under his command: Half of the wing to guard the holding, others to spread the word of Fax's demise, etc. She gave the watch-wher a farewell pat on the head and walked to where Mnementh was waiting in the courtyard.

"I'd forgotten about the watch-wher. Do you need anything for him?" asked F'lar as Mnementh cocked his foreleg to provide Lessa a step up.

"Nothing really. Just making my farewells. Anything unusual come up

that I should know about?" She made the vault to the bronze's neck with the ease of long experience. She produced a well-worn riding belt from her subspace pocket and buckled it on. "I need to remember to put a new belt in my pocket sometime soon," she mused to herself.

"Nothing major, although Lytol and Gemma have something of a history this loop. Nothing scandalous; just a little more mutual fondness than usual." F'lar pulled himself up behind her and started strapping them both into Mnementh's riding harness.

"Usual wager about whether Jaxom has a step-father before the start of the Pass?" teased Lessa as they took to the air. F'lar chuckled in response.

The transition between to Benden Weyr was made less uncomfortable thanks to another skill she'd learned from the Sweeper. Selective temperature control did come in handy at altitude when all you were wearing was rags.

As Mnementh alighted on his ledge, F'lar glanced around the bowl and counted dragons. "The others are still on their Search patterns," he concluded. After unbuckling Lessa from the harness, he gestured toward his suite behind the bronze's weyr. "Your bath awaits, my lady."

She dismounted and favoured the bronze rider with a leer. "Care to join me after Mnementh has fed?"

Mnementh rumbled amusement. I'm pretty sure I can manage without you, he informed his rider. Go ahead and get reacquainted.

Lessa allowed herself a faint smile as she led F'lar into the weyr. This was a homecoming of sorts. She missed Ramoth terribly, but a proper reunion with her weyrmate would help alleviate the worst of it for a while.

* * *

><p>"...So my experience as a drudge was actually useful when I studied with the Sweeper," Lessa said as they ate following her...bath.<p>

"So is he a looper?" asked F'lar.

"Loop-aware at the very least; many of the senior monks are. Then that Lobsang Ludd boy showed up. I couldn't keep up with them when they went off on their adventure â€" I can barely slice down to a four-to-one dilation and can't keep it up for more than thirty subjective seconds â€" so I was stuck keeping the monastery tidy and minding the Abbot. Sweet child when he didn't have to deal with his own pack of hidebounds."

F'lar stretched and stood. "Two days until the Hatching. We can't hole up in here for all that time; people will talk. You up to helping Manora?"

"Sure. What will you do?"

"I think I'll take the half-wing that isn't guarding Ruatha on a

sweep of Fax's old territory to make sure nothing takes us by surprise."

"Sounds like a plan."

* * *

><p>Lessa stood oddly calm with the gaggle of other girls on the hatching sands. Even though it meant interacting with Kylara on a prolonged basis, she had made an effort over the past two days to help the other candidates with not panicking when the shells started cracking.<p>

And as usual, it had not worked as well as she liked. The shrieks of fright still made her wince.

At least the boys weren't being injured at the default rate; her quiet anonymous words "covered with liberal use of mental suggestion to fog their source" about what to expect had done that much good.

In a matter of minutes the ten eggs containing Ramoth's clutchmates had hatched with thankfully few casualties, and the new pairs had been led off to the weyrling barracks. An uneasy murmur had started circulating among the riders gathered in the stands. The great gold egg was rocking rhythmically, but it seemed the young queen wanted to make sure she was the absolute center of attention when she made her entrance.

The adult dragons' hatching thrum came to a crescendo. Lessa almost unconsciously advanced toward the golden orb with a slow but steady tread.

Ramoth's egg appeared to crumble in place. Amid the cascade of small fragments, the gold dragon posed as regally as a hatchling could. Her head swivelled briefly before locking gazes with Lessa.

And all of the longing Lessa had felt for the past five days, all of the nagging worries about how this loop would unfold, vanished in the joy of their reunion.

You're a little late, observed the Weyrwoman.

A Queen is never late. Nor is she early. She hatches exactly when she intends to, responded Ramoth haughtily.

Lessa giggled despite herself.

Smaug and Gandalf send their regards, added the gold dragon. _Now, can I please get something to eat?_

Oblivious to the descending bronze dragons, oblivious to the presence of their riders, Lessa stood caressing the head of the most wonderful creature of all Pern, fully prescient of troubles and glories, but most immediately aware that Lessa of Pern was again Weyrwoman to Ramoth the Golden for now and forever.

* * *

><p>10.15<p>

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><p>Twenty minutes, Mnementh sent softly.

"I know, I know," F'lar replied, taking one final look at his meticulously plotted star charts.

Star charts for midnight standard time, 5th of May, year 5237, Earth reckoning.

It's a long, long way, Mnementh added.

"That it is." F'lar picked up his helmet, and sealed it to his skinsuit. (No clunky multi-ply plastic within Pernese capabilities, this. He'd had it made in Manticore to his own specifications, with the Pern planetary flag â€" gold dragon on pale blue stripe, red human on green stripe, silver dolphin on dark blue stripe â€" on the shoulders and cuffs.) "Testing," he added, over the external speakers. "Air supply looks good."

I hear you, his dragon reported. _All lights are green._

"Excellent." The Weyrleader unsealed it again, and motioned Mnementh to put on his own helmet.

For this jump, even a bronze dragon would need an air supply. No suit, because dragonhide was vacuum-safe, but the helmet would provide much-needed air.

Everything is okay from in here, Mnementh said after the helmet was on snug.

"And from out here," F'lar concurred.

They gazed up at the sky, searching for a point of light. The faint yellow star that was the ultimate home of every man, woman and child on Pern.

"Not home, really..." F'lar mused, aloud. "Pern is our home. But it's where our ancestors came from."

Mnementh rumbled laughter. _I'd like to see the place._

F'lar nodded back to him. "Nearly time."

He mounted Mnementh, careful to avoid damaging the tough synthetics of the suit, and pumped his arm.

Near-silently, the great bronze took wing.

* * *

><p>Mnementh, F'lar sent softly. _You tell Lessa where we're going._

Mnementh rumbled laughter again. _I will._

And remember the relative stellar motion, as well, he admonished,

then caught himself. "Sorry," he added aloud. "Nerves."

I do not mind. Mnementh beat his wings once more. _Time._

Man and dragon vanished.

* * *

><p>And let me put it this way, F'lar concluded, smiling in the nothingness of _Between. If you hadn't turned up just when you did, I'd be singing soprano for the rest of my life._

That is what I had gathered, Mnementh replied, amusement tingeing his tone. _It sounds worse than I had thought, though._

Oh, it was a bit. F'lar took another deep, even breath. _You know how we two-legs exaggerate, though._

I do, Mnementh agreed. _Farli never shuts up about her human. Now, what happened when-_

Stars. Thousands and thousands of stars, and then F'lar and Mnementh were whooping and laughing with relief after nearly half an hour of the endless blackness of _Between._

"Oh, you wonderful creature!" F'lar exulted, though his mental voice was the only one that carried to his triumphant bronze. "One hundred and seventy light years! Yes!"

Mnementh was already twisting his body with the practised motions of a vacuum-trained dragon, bringing his wings close in to his body and moving them one way then extending them to full span and moving them the other, building and then releasing angular momentum.

Where are we... he muttered, eyes whirling as he sought out reference points. _There is the star... that is the constellation known as Orion... aha!_

F'lar shared Mnementh's eyes for a moment, and gazed down at the tiny dot of blue.

Good aim, he complimented. _It's showing a disc._

Only to my eyes. Mnementh rumbled in pleasure anyway, something that F'lar felt through the bones of his legs. _I have my next target. Closing in._

Blackness again.

* * *

><p>"Sir?"<p>

Admiral Runniya looked up from her mug of coffee. "What is it, lieutenant?"

"Sir, we had a contact on the scanners. Nothing big, but... thought you should know, since you're visiting."

"Interesting." Runniya put her coffee down and walked over to the

command console. "Let's see it."

"Here, sir." The lieutenant reached into the console and 'threw' the imagery up onto the big holotank. "Little echo on the screens, right here. Popped in out of nowhere, then vanished again."

"Hm." The Admiral considered that. "No need to go to alert yet, lieutenant, but I may just task a patrol ship to look at your contact."

"As you say, sir." The lieutenant brought up a comm window and 'threw' it out of his console towards her, and she caught it deftly. "Hope that's sufficient."

"More than sufficient," she assured him. "Let's see, now..."

She cleared her throat. "Patrol craft Starry Ice, this is Admiral Runniya. Nothing urgent, boys, I just have a sensor trace for you to look at. Coordinates attached."

At her signal, the lieutenant transferred the coords to her screen.

"Probably nothing, but you need to earn your keep someday. Admiral out."

"Uh..." the lieutenant said, drawing the attention of his superior. "We have another contact. Much closer this time. And... sir, you're going to want to see this."

He threw the imagery up on the big holotank.

Admiral Runniya blinked.

"...that's a dragon. Wearing a space helmet."

"Why I thought you were going to want to see it, sir," the lieutenant pointed out. "Way above my pay grade."

As they watched, the dragon snaked its neck out, revealing someone in some kind of space suit was atop its back. Then it blinked out again, like a popped soap bubble.

Runniya raised an eyebrow at the lieutenant, who started scanning for the same signature to appear again.

* * *

><p>"...you're from Rukbat."<p>

F'lar nodded, sipping at the mug of cocoa. It wasn't really as good as klah in his opinion. "I was born there, so was my father, and we're descended ultimately from the original colonists. I think we once traced my line back to Admiral Benden."

Runniya had to think hard to remember the name. "...Benden... the name rings a faint bell." She snapped her fingers. "Got it. Nathi war."

"We don't know much about that, really," F'lar apologized. "As I

understand it â€" and as AIVAS said â€" he came to join the colony to escape war."

He took another sip. _Between_ was cold.

"Right." Runniya exhaled sharply. "Sorry, I'm having to come at this in little bits, because it's so huge."

She gestured at the lieutenant, who brought up some incredibly old navy files. "Rukbat is under the interdict â€" it is reported as having been wiped out by some mycoorzyd organism from the Oort cloud, which claimed the lives of all but about a dozen of the original colonists."

Thread, _Mnementh 'pathed ominously. _What we were bred to fight._

This time, the naval officers didn't jump â€" having heard him before, they were now at least a little ready for the concept of a teleporting telepathic telekinetic space dragon alien.

A little.

"Might I suggest," F'lar said, with care, "that your files clearly have some minor omissions?"

Runniya gave him a look. Then sighed. "Oh, this is just perfect, isn't it... okay. Lieutenant?"

"Sir?"

"Prep an order for at least ten Brainships to make for Rukbat. We appear to have a first contact situation that's two and a half thousand years in the making."

Ah, _Mnementh sent, with just the right amount of artfully controlled distaste. _The slow way._

* * *

><p>10.* (not actually a dragon loop)<p>

* * *

><p>"Wait, wait, wait!" Bilbo said, waving his hands, as the troll lifted him. "Before you try and eat me, you should know. I'm a Hobbit."<p>

"We ain't aten a Hobbit before," the first troll said.

"A little garlic and it'll taste as good as the rest," the second one informed him.

"Ah, but do you know _why_ you've never eaten a Hobbit?" Bilbo continued. He kept talking without a pause. "It's because, if anyone tries to hurt a hobbit, they tend to... to... to catch fire!"

"Catch fire?" the third one repeated. "Why'd they do that?"

"No-one knows," Bilbo said. "But they do."

"Oi, hold on," the second one said, frowning. "This is one of them tricks, isn't it?"

"Try it if you want," Bilbo said, voice wavering slightly. "But I thought you should know."

The first one picked him up. "I ain't gonna fall for none of them tricks."

Then there was a roaring gout of flame.

* * *

><p>"Told you," Bilbo said, brushing himself off. "Somehow that always happens."<p>

The trolls were too calcined to say anything. The dwarves, however, were not so inhibited.

"B-b... Bilbo," Fili said, pointing. "There's a dragon behind you."

"That's not just any dragon," Thorin shouted, struggling. "It's Smaug! He's tracked us down!"

"Dragon?" Bilbo repeated, turning. As he did, the leaves shook from the trees and the ground trembled with the impact of mighty feet. "I don't see a dragon."

"That's because it moved to stay behind you!" Bofur said. "It's the other side of you now!"

Bilbo turned again. Again, the ground shook, and branches cracked aside. Again, he saw no dragon.

"Are you just having me on?" Bilbo asked, hands on hips. "This isn't kind to a poor Hobbit, you know."

Thorin muttered something unrepeatable in Khuzdul.

Bilbo suddenly spun about, twirling on one foot. "Aha!"

No dragon. There was a dragon-shaped hole in the underbrush, as though a dragon had until very recently been there, but no actual dragon.

"Well, I can't see it," Bilbo said, shrugging and giving up. "Shall I get you all out?"

* * *

><p>That, Bilbo thought some minutes later, _was hilarious._

Indeed, Smaug replied, through what had fairly quickly faded to a simple communication link and stuck that way. _I loved their expressions. Should we do this again?_

If you can take time out of your busy schedule, Bilbo suggested. _I

think next is the spiders. That should be fun._

Indubitably. Smaug's tone changed slightly. _Now, since you have a long walk ahead of you, and I've got dinner to eat, shall we continue our discussion?_

Of course. Bilbo fell into step near the back of a party of dwarves - most of whom were giving him suspicious looks. _Now, as to the role of Beren and Luthien. I am of the opinion that the tale shows that, while neither is blameless, the elves had become worse than the humans had at that point. It's an extension of their more perfect state - even their evil is worse._

Possibly, possibly, Smaug replied. _But that still leaves open the question of whether Beren is the more virtuous, or Luthien for rising from further in the depths of what we shall call misanthropy for convenience._

* * *

><p>10.16<p>

* * *

><p>-Brekke looked around, startled.<p>

"Where..." she began, suddenly recognizing a room at Benden Weyr. The one she'd been in once, many years ago, before...

Before she met Wirenth.

Don't think about it, she told herself fiercely. _Don't. Berd told you-_

Where was Berd?

Brekke could normally feel the little bronze constantly keeping one eye on her. Even when she was asleep " or he was " there was that little part of Berd keeping a careful watch to make sure she was okay.

But now... no Berd.

Am I alone? Brekke asked herself.

She looked around. Where was F'nor?

Canth?

What is it, Canth asked. Then Brekke sensed a certain confusion over the link. _Who are you? Are... are you the one we found on Search?_

Brekke broke the connection, too startled for surprise.

If Canth hadn't been there, that would be one thing. But... for him not to _remember_ her?

Brekke only now noticed the state of her hands. Rough, callused... from trowel and hoe.

And she was in a white robe. Somehow, impossibly, she was not only back in time but younger than she had been.

She had... only just been Searched. That had to mean-

A deep thrumming echoed through Benden. Brekke recognized it instantly, and was already standing when F'nor came through the door.

"Ah, good," F'nor said, smiling pleasantly at her. "...Brekke, correct? Yes, that means the Hatching has started."

F'nor didn't recognize her. Or, he did, but barely.

"And Canth told me that you touched his mind. A good sign. Come on, we'd better hurry."

* * *

><p>Brekke remembered little of the next several minutes. The shock of being in the past, of her husband's polite distance, of no Berd and a surprised Canth... they all combined to mean that she reacted more or less on instinct as F'nor mounted her on Canth and they moved quickly to the hatching grounds.<p>

She found herself in the characteristic semi-circle of candidates around Ramoth's golden egg â€" her third queen, if Brekke remembered correctly â€" and almost looked around again for Berd, as he'd intervened in dramatic fashion last time she'd been on a hatching ground.

But there was no faithful bronze fire-lizard here. In fact â€" she abruptly realized â€" there were no fire-lizards whatsoever, attached to anyone on Pern.

After the last few decades of her life, that was difficult to remember. But there it was.

While she'd been wondering, the hatching had begun in earnest. Bronze dragon after blue dragon after green dragon after brown broke shell, stumbled out onto the sand, and identified the person who was their best match.

It was stranger still, to see only boys on the sands. It was dear Mirrim who had opened everyone to that possibility, wasn't it? Brekke realized she hadn't met her fosterling yet. Something else to remember.

The golden shell wobbled, drawing gasps from the other candidates.

Brekke looked back at the crowd for a moment, spotting F'nor and drawing heart from his presence. Even if they barely knew one another yet â€" that was still F'nor. She could-

She turned back.

And soothing, rainbow warmth washed over her.

Like sand into a hollow. Water down a river.

Filling a hole torn so long ago, one which had long been dammed but never quite gone.

Brekke felt her knees give way.

I, dear one, am Wirenth.

The gold dragon pushed the remainder of the eggshell aside, and moved forward with finicky care straight for her new rider.

But â€" you already know that. Wirenth sounded puzzled. _And_ I_ already know that. I know you. That is not how Hatching works._

We can work it out later, Wirenth, Brekke told her, embracing that slender golden neck. Savouring the sheer joy and relief of being able to say that. _Because, now, we are together again._

* * *

><p>"Shards," F'lar murmured to his Weyrmate. "I wish F'nor were Awake to see this."<p>

Lessa looked up sharply. "She's-"

F'lar nodded. "I've seen a lot of Impressions. That is _not_ the behaviour Brekke and Wirenth usually have."

He smiled, watching as â€" with even more reluctance than was usual for newly bonded pairs â€" Brekke released Wirenth, and the two headed over to the exits of the hatching ground.

Mnementh, he added. _Please â€" tomorrow â€" tell Wirenth that I would like to speak to her and her new rider._

Of course, F'lar. Mnementh cocked his head slightly, then nodded equally imperceptibly. _You are giving them tonight?_

That's right, F'lar sent, congratulating his partner. _You're getting better at catching subtleties like that._

I think it is because of that time I was a fire lizard, actually, Mnementh mused. _Fire lizards have better memories than we dragons do, and dragons think better than fire lizards. Perhaps we have to be both to be like humans._

F'lar filed that insight away for later.

Perhaps the bronze was right. After all, by all accounts Zair was now rather hard to shut up.

* * *

><p>AN:<p>

10.1: Sometimes, Loopers need information that is on a sensitive topic.

>110.2: This is why.
10.3: Piemur does not have great skill with writing music.

>10.4: Sandy is good for him.
10.5: Minor side effect of dragon loops - they basically always get the same dragon partner. Sanity protection reasons.
>10.6: Gamers.
10.7: Slow but steady progress. (And he didn't call Yongxing brother. He called himself brother TO Yongxing. Not the same thing.)
>10.8: AIVAS has words for you.
10.9: Impression is important. Very important. (Also, red-gold is not a normal colour for a queen dragon.)
>10.10: Ten years in the past, two years of incredibly concentrated effort, and one absolutely perfect payoff.
10.11: Logic.
>10.12: Dragon Tales, if you're wondering.
10.13: Dragon typecast.

>10.14: Being without your dragon is a skill most loopers need to learn on Pern. Only Canth and Mnemeth start out hatched.
10.15: Strangely, Pern actually exists in the same setting as several of Anne's other works, like Ship Who Sang. And I'm having Paul Benden being about as notable a historical figure as, say, Hannibal Barca. How's the Pern planetary flag?
>10.*: Not actually a dragon loop â€" it's in Arda â€" but it follows up on Smaug and B'lbó. Er, Bilbo.
10.16: Brekke has seriously earned this.

Comments, of course, appreciated.

11. Chapter 11

Caution: these contain spoilers for the second film.

Note: There are a fair few non-HTTYD loops in this set. This fic will now contain some loops from other dragon-centric settings at times. (Not Spyro, though, that's got its own set.)

* * *

><p>11.1<p>

* * *

><p>Stoic answered the phone.<p>

He was still getting used to what Hiccup called "Nuclear tech" loops. The state of technology which seemed standard for quite a few baselines, and one which â€" this time â€" applied to their own.

Rather than a set of islands in the North Sea, Berk was a dragon nature sanctuary in the mid-west of Vinland.

They called it the USA, but to Stoic it was Vinland.

He, Valka and Gobber ran it; the kids were hired-on help or (in the case of Hiccup and Astrid) lived here; and, of course, Drago was a shady property developer.

Seeing that slab-like body in a suit was just hilariously weird.

"Hello?" he said into the phone, without preamble. "Stoic the Vast

â€" ah, Stoic Haddock here."

A pause.

"Yes, Hiccup."

"Yes, I know you've got a driving license. You insisted on getting one."

"Pardon?" Stoic put a finger in his other ear. "There's a lot of noise, are you â€" that's better. What was that?"

"Yes, I know you can drive pickups."

"Why are you asking all these simple questions, Hiccup?"

There was a longer than usual pause. Then Stoic let out a loud sigh. "Okay, hand me over."

He rubbed the bridge of his nose, whistling erratically, then cleared his throat. "Okay, officer. Yes, Hiccup's my son, he's qualified to drive the truck, he's got a livestock transportation license, and he most certainly can transport livestock with the truck. And yes, I know he's got them."

A pause. A very brief pause.

"Then what's the problem? Look, it's not a fake ID, and I know he's got the truck. What's the problem?"

"Well then that's their problem."

He put the phone back on the hook, on the second try. "Shards, I still haven't gotten the hang of this..."

* * *

><p>"See?" Hiccup demanded. "What's the problem?"<p>

Can we get going? Toothless asked Hiccup plaintively. I want to stick my head out the side of the truck and loll my tongue out again.

"The problem, young man, is that you're causing a disturbance." With a disapproving frown, the patrolman ripped up the ticket he'd been writing. "I can't actually charge you with it, but â€" I'll be watching you, kid."

After another glare, the man got back into his vehicle, and drove off slowly. Looking back at them in the mirror until he was out of sight.

"Phew." Hiccup exhaled, then swung up into the driver's seat. "Sorry about that, bud."

Never mind sorry, Toothless said impatiently. Let's just get back to the road trip!

"Yeah, we're probably going to be stopped again if we make too many more people nearly crash." Hiccup directed a look at his partner. "So

if you'd just _try_ not to freak people out...?"

Sorry, couldn't hear you over the sound of us not going on a road trip. Toothless spread his wings, making unhappy noises. _It's not often we get to go on a journey without these carrying us._

"Just get yourself back in the seatbelt." Hiccup turned the ignition, and shifted the truck into first gear. (After all the times he'd had to use the tail fin with Toothless, a stick shift seemed easier.)

He didn't let the clutch out until there was a " somehow, sullen " _click_ from the truck bed.

* * *

><p>11.2<p>

* * *

><p>Louise de Valliere triggered her summoning spell. This
had to work!

With a bright flash of green light, something very big dropped into the centre of the circle.

"Well, well," the teacher said with an interested eyebrow-raise. "It appears, miss Louise, that you've summoned a dragon."

He frowned. "But I'm not sure what kind..."

I? The black dragon raised up on his hind legs, flaring his wings. _I am the Unholy Offspring of Lightning and Death Itself! I am a Night Fury, the swiftest of all dragons, possessed of a mighty flame that burns even rock! I am-_ the tone of the silent voice changed from bragging to confused. _Okay, you're not Hiccup. What the Hel's going on?_

"Hi, bud," one of the other students said, waving from next to a large griffin.

Okay, nope. The dragon took off with a slamming wingbeat, and flew over to the other student " leaving Louise looking rather startled in the summoning circle.

* * *

><p>What's going on? Toothless repeated. _What is going on? Who's _that?

Hiccup nodded to the griffin, who rolled upright.

Tail lashing, the griffin crunched her foreclaws together with a _clack_ sound. "_She_, you right pillock, is Gilda the Griffin."

Toothless looked Gilda up and down. _Oh, yeah, I remember you " the shouty one._ This earned a snigger from Hiccup and a look from Gilda. _How's Equestria?_

"Could be worse." Gilda shrugged, then punched Toothless in the

shoulder. "You're all right, dragon. Now, what was the big deal?"

Well... Toothless twitched his wings in a shrug. _Hiccup is sorta mine. I've been here before, it's just... you're kind of in my slot._

Gilda tapped her beak. "Right, right." (By now, most of the students had gotten over their shock at a talking dragon and a talking griffin, and were actually listening to what they were _saying_.)
"Tell you what. Swap?"

Fine by me.

Toothless strutted over to lie down behind Hiccup, neatly taking the place Gilda had vacated.

Gilda, for her part, fluttered over to land in the summoning ring. "Right," she said, pointing at Louise. "You're with me now. You pass the coffee, I beat stuff up."

Louise looked helplessly at Colbert, who pursed his lips. "It's very irregular... has the summoning contract been completed yet?"

"Just did it with Toothless!" Hiccup called. "Gilda never got bonded."

"Yeah," Gilda agreed. "Okay, how do we do this?"

"Bonding is sealed with a kiss," Colbert said automatically.

"I'm not into bipeds," Gilda replied near-instantly.

* * *

><p>11.3<p>

* * *

><p>"Wow," Hiccup said, looking at his friend. "You really got the short end of the stick this time, right?"<p>

Toothless nodded, and scratched behind one ear. _'scuse me, can you not do that?_

"Sorry." Hiccup made sure to hold his hand level.

That's better. Toothless walked around in a circle on the palm, then curled up. _I'm flippin' miniscule. Can't I just shift to normal size?_

"Actually..." Hiccup snapped the fingers of his other hand. "How's your fire breath?"

Not tried yet. Hold on.

Toothless got up, walked to the tip of one finger, inhaled, and then spat a plasma ball that was several times larger than _he_ was. It blew a tree to bits â€" fortunately sending it crashing down away from them â€" and scattered flaming splinters all over the forest

floor.

"Whoa!" Hiccup shouted, and waved a hand a little too enthusiastically. Toothless barely escaped going flying.

Oi!

"Sorry, bud..." Hiccup stroked down Toothless' back with his left forefinger, and the chibi-Night Fury subsided. "So your fireballs are the same as normal... actually, though, we could use this for a funny."

Really? Toothless looked up at him, eye ridges raised. _How?_

* * *

><p>"...and so, great Drago," Hiccup concluded, bringing forward a chest. "This is the tribute we have rendered unto you."<p>

Drago Bludvist opened the chest, chuckling. "Even the dragon master understands," he commented. "What is this?"

Under the works of beaten gold, and the valuable gemstones, and the ornately made glazed pottery, was a small wooden box.

Inside that, Drago discovered as he continued to investigate, was a long ream of fine silk cloth. Unwrapping that revealed a smaller jewellery box, and opening _that_ revealed a matchbox-sized cardboard contrivance.

Drago puzzled over it for a moment, before working out that to open it one pressed on one end. He did, and promptly exploded.

Does this make me a Trojan Dragon? Toothless asked, hovering up out of the matchbox.

"More like a drake-in-the-box, I think..." Hiccup picked up the cloak of dragonhide. "I never worked out what this was actually _from..."

* * *

><p>11.4<p>

* * *

><p>"Well, so much for that hope," Lessa said, sighing.<p>

Ramoth rumbled soothingly. _It is only for this time._

"I know, dear heart." Lessa caressed Ramoth's wing shoulder, and smiled. Then her expression turned a little more sour. "I now know what F'lar goes through rather more often than I do."

I miss him, Ramoth mused. _And Mnementh. This Mnementh is very like the one we know, but... he is _less_, somehow. I suppose it is mostly that he is younger._

"I think he's less affected than other dragons are by looping,

actually," Lessa volunteered. "Ruth was least of all â€" even when he's not looping, I can have a very full conversation with him â€" but Mnementh is quite bright even when he's not looping."

Ramoth sighed. _At least we flew well. There is that._

"There is indeed." Lessa smiled, remembering the previous day. Then a delightfully wicked idea occurred to her. "Dear one â€" do we know who the Anchor is, if not F'lar?"

_Oh, yes, there _does_ have to be one, doesn't there?_ Ramoth's tone turned interested. _Well, he's nowhere in Benden â€" we'd have noticed._

"And it's not someone taking Jaxom's place, either." Lessa tapped her chin. "Hm. I sort of wish I had a better education. This loop, I mean," she amended.

After contemplating for a moment more, she stood. "If they're not here, then there's one place they're likely to be. Let's go check."

Of course. Ramoth bent to allow Lessa to climb on. _Is this technically Between lessons?_

"I'll teach you if you teach me." Lessa blinked. "Hm, sounded a bit like a song..."

Appropriate. Ramoth took off, and vanished.

* * *

><p>High above Fort Hold, the golden dragon that was Ramoth blinked into existence.<p>

"There they are," Lessa said, pointing. "That would be Lady Benoria's unexpected trip to Benden."

As she spoke, the brown dragon and his flanking blues disappeared, to go and make F'lar's point about the futility of attempting military coercion on a Weyr.

Aha, Ramoth announced. _You were right, dear Lessa. Harper Hall._

"Well, then, let's pay them a visit," Lessa instructed, and Ramoth began to descend in tight spirals.

* * *

><p>"Ah, Weyrwoman Lessa. How nice to see you," the Masterharper said, eyes sparkling with good humour. "And Ramoth the Golden, as well."<p>

Greetings, Masterharper Olorin, Ramoth replied formally.

"I'm a little surprised to see it's you in particular," Lessa said, sitting down. "Do try some of the wine, Benden wines are remarkably good even in the multiverse."

"I actually find myself preferring the Tillek," Gandalf informed her. "It's a little foxy, perhaps, but it has a certain something."

"Now I know you're not Robinton," Lessa laughed. "He can't get enough of Benden."

"I can't blame him â€" even that is very good. Now," and Gandalf favoured her with a look. "I'm wondering â€" what can I expect, here?"

"A few things." Lessa shrugged. "In particular, Robinton Impresses a fire-lizard at one point. You know of them? Miniature dragons?"

"I have occasionally heard tell, yes." Gandalf nodded, absorbing that. "Any idea who it may be?"

For you, perhaps Shadowfax. Ramoth shifted slightly on her spot outside â€" Lessa could hear a quite spectacular amount of gossip going on as harpers debated whether to approach the only golden queen on all of Pern.

"Ah, Shadowfax..." Gandalf smiled. "I've never been quite sure if he is looping. He has a certain elemental horse sense â€" if you'll pardon the pun."

"I don't," Lessa said tartly.

"Oh, shame..."

"Well, it's nice to know who the Anchor is." Lessa stood, and shook his hand. "Feel free to call me any time. Drum me up, and Ramoth can open a conversation."

"Most generous." Masterharper Olorin, as he was here, showed her to the door. "I trust you have places to be?"

"Places to be, times to visit, and significant others to discombobulate." Lessa rubbed her hands together, still in riding leathers. "It's so rare I get to prank him."

* * *

><p>"F'lar..." Lessa said, nervously. "I know R'gul said queens don't fly..."<p>

F'lar snorted at that.

"That's about what I thought," she agreed. "But I wanted to try anyway. So I got Ramoth saddled up, and tried going Between."

F'lar stood from the desk, and stepped around it. "You did what? That is incredibly dangerous, Lessa!"

It wasn't hard, Ramoth said, hurt. It's instinct. So long as you know where to go, you get there.

"Well... about that." Lessa ducked adroitly under his arms, and shrugged. "I kind of got lost, and I found these very nice men and women."

They followed us home, Ramoth took up the thread. _Can we keep them?_

"Keep who?" F'lar asked, momentarily lost.

"Well, let's see..." Lessa began counting on her fingers. "There's T'ron, Mardra, Merika, T'kul, G'narish, D'ram, Fanna, Bedella, R'mart, and I think that's almost it for the Weyrleaders..."

I can't remember the name of the Igen Weyrwoman either, Ramoth consoled her. _And then there is G'dened, B'zon, G'lanar... we'd list them all, but there are about two and a half thousand of them._

On cue, the trumpeting of thousands upon thousands of dragons filled the sky.

Quick as lightning, Lessa slipped her camera out of her Pocket and took a picture of F'lar's face. It was _so_ rare she got to do this to him, and it deserved preservation.

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><p>11.5<p>

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><p>"What's that?" Crenden asked, shading his eyes. "Looks like there might be a storm ahead."<p>

"Pardon?" one of the drovers said. "Not storm weather."

"Well, look." Crenden Lilcamp pointed. "What's that, if not lightning?"

Jayge's heart leapt into his throat. "Dragons," he said softly, then raised his voice. "Father, it's dragons â€" fighting Thread!"

"It's-"

Jayge saw his father's face collapse, with the realization that they were hours from any shelter.

"What can we do?" someone whispered.

"...I don't..." Crenden shook himself. "Fire, or water, or hard stone. That's all that works."

"Will the dragons save us?"

"I don't know," Crenden replied. "And Benden's only got a few hundred fighting dragons â€" can they possibly protect everything? And-" he scowled. "We're hours from shelter, curse me for a _fool_."

"The river?"

"It'll have to be the river." Crenden pointed at Jayge. "Son â€" take your runner-beast, find the best path to the river. We'll have to chance it, save everyone we can. Go!"

Before Jayge had spun his runner, a dragon erupted out of the air. Much closer to them, close enough to make the runner-beasts and herd-beasts flinch and moan with proximity.

The brown dragon landed up-slope, and its rider jumped down with focused haste. "Are you the Lilcamp traders?"

"Yes â€" yes, brown rider," Crenden replied. "I'm Crenden Lilcamp, head of this train."

"F'nor, rider of brown Canth." The rider nodded. "I'm half-brother of F'lar, Benden weyrleader. We sent out sweep riders to help make sure none of the old-time riders missed a new holding-" he held up a hand to forestall questions which did not materialize, "and Renth saw you out on the road. Surely you heard Thread was due?"

Crenden frowned, eyes dark. "Not when we left our last stop," he said, and Jayge noticed the evasion â€" a runner had caught up with them after barely an hour on the road, but no-one had believed him.

F'nor gave him a cool look. "I see," he said eventually. "Right. Canth â€" tell Lessa there's some traders out in the open."

He paused, then continued. "We're going to bring in a dozen flamethrowers to help protect the immediate area, and three wings of dragons to shield you. We can't promise anything, but we'll do what we can. Only â€" stay here! We need to know where to cover."

Crenden nodded, relief obvious on his face. "Thank you, brown rider F'nor. Only..."

Jayge watched as his father's hand swept the sky â€" taking in the darting specks of dragons, much nearer now, and the eruptions of flame as they seared Thread. "Where did these dragons all come from? More than Benden has."

F'nor winked. "Remember the Question song, Crenden Lilcamp."

Canth bugled, and three wings of dragons appeared in formation. They were at different heights â€" the highest well above any of the nearby mountains, the lowest barely clearing the hilltop around which the trace ran.

A moment later, three greens appeared in a V-shape. They landed downslope of Canth, next to the traders, and began passing out long slender wands.

"Did you- good." F'nor nodded to a passenger on one of the greens. "Saren will see you to rights. Listen to what he tells you, and you should be able to sear any Thread we miss."

With that, the brown rider leapt aside Canth and took off.

Jayge followed him with his eyes, until the brown winked out.

F'nor, rider of brown Canth. _He'd remember that name.

He wanted to buy that brown rider a drink.

* * *

><p>"That's one good deed," F'nor said to Canth as they climbed.<p>

To add to many. Canth looked up at Leading Edge, which had nearly reached them. _I like Jayge. He is good to that girl Aramina._

He inhaled, and spat flame, charring away a wide swath of the horrible organism which had made it through the wings higher up.

Perhaps this time he will not hate dragon riders so much.

F'nor looked down, and saw the remnants caught by a green. Another green darted down and destroyed a burrow.

Fighting Thread was what dragons were made to do. They did a lot more, but... it was good to get back to the roots now and again.

* * *

><p>11.6<p>

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><p>"Woo!" Snotlout announced, swaggering into the main room and throwing his riding gloves to the table. "Easy!"<p>

"What was?" Hiccup asked, looking up from a history book about the mid-ninth century.

"Oh... well, guess who just did the Grand Slam in an afternoon?" Snotlout pointed to his chest. "This guy."

"Which grand slam do you mean?" Hiccup closed the book, and looked up.

"Highest mountains on every continent, and both poles." Snotlout struck a pose. "Who's the man?"

"Actually..." Hiccup held in a snigger at the antics of his friend. "First off, stop posing, you'll curdle the milk." Snotlout slumped, though his own expression showed he was trying not to laugh himself. "And second, technically, you have to _climb_ the mountain for a Grand Slam. Or _walk_ to the pole."

"...aw, come on!" Snotlout kicked the table leg. "It took Hook and me a week to get those coordinates!"

"Yeah, going _Between_ really isn't in the spirit of the challenge." Hiccup shrugged. "Perhaps you _should_ try walking? I mean, most mountain climbers don't have a partner who can set himself on fire, and pockets mean we have no such thing as supply issues."

I like the sound of that, Hookfang put in. _It sounds like it would be quite a journey._

"You sure, Hook?" Snotlout checked.

I think I am.

"Okay. Hey, Hiccup, if anyone asks where I've gone for the next, like, month... I'm climbing Mount Snotlout."

"_Everest,_ " Hiccup replied with a sigh. "Or Chomolungma, or even SagarmÄ•thÄ•."

"I put my flag on it first, so it's my mountain." Snotlout was out the door before Hiccup could retort again.

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><p>11.7<p>

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><p>Good morning, Beauty sent.

The other fire-lizard raised himself up on his wings and forelegs, and chirped welcome.

Beauty's eyes whirled with gentle green pleasure. _You are a very polite little fire lizard._

Sandy cocked his head for a moment, then nodded, and looked back down at his still-sleeping human.

You do him a lot of good, Beauty added. _I can never tell how much you understand..._

The brown met her gaze, then frowned in concentration. A picture appeared in Beauty's mind â€" Camo, cleaning the fireplace in a room in which the youngest of the Hall were learning their basic teaching ballads. Sandy was on his shoulder, and the two of them were both nodding almost imperceptibly in time with the music.

Beauty was quite astonished. Both that Sandy had been able to construct an image related to her statement, and that it had involved a view of himself â€" from the outside.

That was interestingly close to abstract thought.

_You are also a very _peculiar_ fire lizard, it seems,_ she sent â€" already wondering who could help determine just how sapient the brown fire-lizard was.

* * *

><p>"Ruth, of course," Menolly suggested. "Who else?"<p>

Beauty laughed. _True. He's halfway to fire lizard himself._

Actually, Diver added, hopping up onto his perch. _Has Ruth ever been a fire lizard?_

"Don't think so." Menolly wrote down another few measures of music. "The closest thing to not being Jaxom's _dragon_ he's been was that time Toric actually Impressed at Benden. You remember?"

I don't, Rocky said.

Neither do I, Diver contributed.

Must have been before these two properly Awoke, Beauty decided, giving her bronzes fond looks. _But yes, I remember. Bronze rider T'ric. Now _that_ was a strange loop..._

"Yes, it was, wasn't it?" Menolly shrugged. "But, I was actually thinking of how it was _Sharra_ who Impressed him that time... well, technically, anyway. Of course Ruth is basically bonded to both of them."

True. Beauty flirted her tail. _We're getting off topic. I'm starting to wonder about Sandy..._

"Well, Jaxom doesn't have the time to pop over to us just yet," Menolly said with a shrug. "You know how it is â€" F'nor becomes High Reaches Weyrleader..."

...and Jaxom's free time evaporates. It was one of the more peculiar patterns.

Rocky shrugged. I_t's not urgent, is it?_

No, I'm just curious. Beauty shook her head and flew to Menolly's shoulder. _What's that you're writing there?_

"Teaching ballad about what AIVAS is." Menolly whistled a few of the bars, then played them on her pan-pipes. "I'm going for woodwind techno."

I hope you don't expect me to sing this, Beauty informed her tartly. _It'd tie my larynx in a knot._

And it wouldn't even shut you up, Diver lamented. Then winced as Beauty shot him a venomous look.

* * *

><p>11.8<p>

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><p>"Ah, another fine day on Berk," Hiccup said, stretching in the sunlight.<p>

Then blinked.

"Wait a sec..." _Toothless?_

Morning, Hiccup, Toothless replied, and Hiccup had the faint phantom-sensations of his dragon partner rolling out of his sleep-circle, shaking himself out, and cleaning his teeth (low flame across the teeth, four seconds.) _What is it?_

_Well... _Hiccup pondered how to put it. _Where the heck did the sea go?_

For as far as Hiccup could see, there was no sweep of majestic (and freezing) North Sea. Just a majestic (and freezing) gently sloping hillside, covered with snow patches and snowdrops and tundra grasses and " surprisingly " crops. Viking crops.

You what? Toothless sent back, then _Okay, that's new. I see a river or two, big ones, heading north " but no sea._

"Oh, wait a second..." Hiccup said aloud.

Berk was, rather than an island, a hilltop fort. It was warrened with tunnels, and provided a safe haven for the nearby population in times of war or disaster.

It was also very chilly, even for the time of year, and the air was uncomfortably thin. Hiccup felt more like he was several thousand feet up a mountainside than at... well, it wasn't sea level any more, was it?

Get over here, would you? Hiccup asked, rummaging in his pocket for one of his more sophisticated harnesses. _Let's have a look from above._

A few seconds later, Toothless appeared, and came gliding in to land in front of him. _Loki and Heimdall, it's unusually hard to fly in air this thin... thanks for the jump imagery._

"Yeah... world as off as this, using remembered images from other loops is dangerous," Hiccup confirmed, and they started the complex process of hooking Toothless into the harness.

It was designed for extreme conditions " specially tough hide, burnished mithril for the metal pieces, doubly redundant, and shimmering with a faint enchantment for durability. Hiccup also attached himself to it in three different places, controlled by four different quick-release catches " he could free himself with both hands, or unlatch two of them ahead of time, but he was unlikely to fall out.

"Right, bud. Let's go exploring."

On it. Toothless spread his wings, took a running start, and hammered at the air. The extra lift from their ground speed turned the trick, and he took to the skies.

_Seriously, how thin _is_ this air?_ Toothless muttered. _Feels like the top of a mountain range..._

"I dunno..." Hiccup rummaged around again, and took out a barometer. "Hmmm... point seven of normal, looks like. Equivalent to about 6,000 feet, roughly I mean."

Huh. Less than I expected. Toothless rolled his wings in a shrug. _I suppose I'm just out of shape then._

"I wasn't going to say anything," Hiccup told him. "Now, since we're only that high, want to try higher?"

How high were you thinking?

"Let's try another few kilometres. Try and get an overview. And... head south." Hiccup took out a compass next, and compared it with the angle of the sun. "Thataway."

* * *

><p>Okay, that is not normal.

"Just what I was thinking," Hiccup replied, taking in the bizarre sight ahead of them.

That's that lake in Caledonia, right? Toothless glanced back at Hiccup. _Loch Ness?_

"Yep. Surrounded by glaciers."

Hiccup sighed, and tapped Toothless on the neck. "We may as well head down, I think it's going to take more than flying straight to work this one out."

You do, huh. Toothless obediently began a long spiral that would bring him down to a landing on the one small island in the Loch.

* * *

><p>"Did you know this was artificial?" Hiccup asked, thumping the ground under them as Toothless moved away from their landing site. "Tells us there used to be people here, at least."<p>

Fascinating, Toothless said, not fascinated. _Where have they gone?_

"That," Hiccup told him, "Is what we are going to find out."

He stepped over to the water's edge. "Okay, here we go... nothing up my left sleeve. Nothing up my right sleeve."

-and something appeared. A very large something, in fact â€" a spindle-shape with two swept wings and two large engines mounted above the fuselage, and nearly thirty feet long.

It appeared about four inches above the waters of the Loch, plunged into it, and produced a small wave that soaked both boy and dragon.

"Whoops..." Hiccup muttered, pressing the buttons to open the door. "Forgot how much these things weigh."

Over two hundred and fifty tonnes? Toothless asked.

"That's about right." As he stepped into the door, Hiccup ran his fingers over the legend written next to the door.

Pinnacle 2 â€" HMS Fafnir â€" Royal Manticoran Navy.

"Remember the Fafnir, bud?" Hiccup asked. He took a few steps further into the pinnacle, and activated the counter-grav to lift it out of

the water entirely.

That was that ship you got on Manticore, once, wasn't it? Toothless asked, stepping in himself. _I seem to recall we got it blown up._

"Only once everyone was off the ship," Hiccup sighed. "Anyway, this is that pinnacle I salvaged and converted for you to use. So if you'd be so kind, oh dragon my dragon?"

I demand a white beret, Toothless said promptly, making for the cabin. _Go check the engines work, please._

"Sure."

* * *

><p>"Right, that's done," Hiccup said, most of an hour later. "Reactor's fuelled up, engines both work on self test, and the electronics are nominal."<p>

Good, Toothless muttered, slightly distracted. _This flight clearance checklist has gotten longer than last time, I swear... okay, item 423. Seal flight deck and cabin._

His tail hooked around to punch a control. _Sealed and seal holding._

"How are you taking her up?" Hiccup asked. "Counter-grav?"

Where would be the fun in that? Toothless asked, placing his forelegs in the control pits and his chin in the wraparound screen " both added to let him drive the pinnacle.

Then he fired the bow thrusters.

* * *

><p>The slender dart of battle-steel jerked in the water, the nose rising abruptly into the air to the thunder of engines and an explosion of spray.<p>

With a sudden roar, the main engines cut in, and their pinnacle shot skywards, leaving behind it a cloud of steam and water vapour, an incredibly loud noise, and a small avalanche into the Loch triggered by the engine blast.

* * *

><p>"Show-off," Hiccup muttered.<p>

Hey, who's driving here? Toothless climbed them steadily into the air, keeping the acceleration within the onboard inertial compensator, and then switched to Impellers at twelve kilometres up once the air-breathing turbines stopped working entirely.

"That was hugely wasteful of reaction mass," Hiccup pointed out.

Yeah, but it was fun. Toothless punched a few more commands into

the computer, and then stepped away from the controls. _Okay, we're headed for a parking orbit. Let's have lunch._

* * *

><p>Well, that answered very little, Toothless said, as they took in the view.

"Yeah," Hiccup agreed. "About all we've learned is that all the water went missing."

Not quite all. But most of it.

Hiccup accepted the correction with a nod. "Does that mean all the air kind of... flowed down into where the oceans used to be?"

Suppose.

"Right." Hiccup clapped Toothless on the shoulder. "You know what this means, Toothless?"

Well, it could mean a lot of things... Toothless hedged.

"It means that, down in those old ocean basins, there's some _really_ thick air. Thicker than we normally ever get to fly in."

...okay, I like the sound of that. The Night Fury headed back to the controls. _I'll take us in for a landing somewhere in the old Arctic Ocean._

* * *

><p>"Well, this is a first," Hiccup said, lying back on the hill they'd found. "Must be all the thicker air and moisture. And the depth."<p>

Yeah. Toothless flapped his wings, grinning at the sensation. _This air feels like the strongest high pressure system ever, times about ten. It's just _so_ easy to fly down here!_

"Air like wine," Hiccup agreed, and picked some more berries from the nearest bush. He ate three, and tossed another couple to Toothless who snatched them out of the air. "And this is the most absurd meal I've had in a long time."

They're just berries.

"Yeah, at the North Pole." Hiccup took another deep breath. "I think I'm going to miss this place. Lovely, not-too-cold climate at the North Pole... air so thick you can practically walk on it... and hundreds of thousands of square miles of uncharted territory to explore."

Very true. Toothless rolled over onto the grass. _Any idea where we should head next? I don't mind flying straight at all, in _this_ climate._

"I was thinking... a grand tour. Given how long our loop normally is, we should be able to fly the length of the Atlantic, and check out

the Pacific " and visit anything interesting along the way."

Hiccup pulled out a holocube, and turned it to a map of the Earth's oceans including bathymetry. He then removed several miles of water, laying bare the unusual world they now found themselves in.

"Here's the basic map. Let's see where it's wrong."

I thought you'd never ask.

* * *

><p>11.9<p>

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><p>"Our next target," Nasuada said, looking around at the rest of the Varden commanders, "is the city of Teirm."<p>

"Easy," Eragon said, leaning back on his chair. "It's impossible to storm, pathetically vulnerable to a siege, and one of the easiest placed to blockade that I know of."

Everyone looked at him.

"Care to explain further?" Nasuada invited.

"Sure." Eragon stood, and snapped his fingers. _"Herma."_

An image appeared in the air, over the top of the map.

Eragon pointed at it. "This is the city. It's surrounded by a curtain wall one hundred feet high, thirty feet thick, and ninety percent pointless."

Angela looked vaguely hurt.

"Pointless?" one of the commanders asked. "Why do you say that?"

"There are two kinds of threat to a city," Eragon answered. "An assault or a siege. An assault would be completely impossible unless you went through the gates " which is still pretty damned hard " but thickening the wall much past ten feet doesn't help with that. It also doesn't really help the wall resist being knocked down. As for height..." Eragon shrugged. "Thirty feet is enough, unless the wall's completely undefended. And it doesn't matter how high it is, a dragon will just fly over it."

But I'm not going in alone against an entire garrison again,
Saphira chimed in.

"Assaulting a city is a ridiculously bloody business," Eragon continued. "So there's the other way of attacking. Siege. Cut off all the supplies in and out, and wait for it to fall."

He indicated the walls. "Since all their money went on those stupid walls, there's no granaries big enough to supply the city for more than about a month. Give it two and the place gives up because

everyone's too hungry."

Finally, as an encore, he indicated the estuary. "And the whole point of the place is to build or receive ships, but the shipping channel is tiny."

"How do you-" Nasuada asked.

Long experience, Eragon thought. "Saphira and I did a fly over. The channel's very easy to see," he said. "Anyway, block that, surround the place, and we'll have it before autumn."

He picked up an apple, and bit into it. "Stupid wall was built to keep out pirates, anyway..." he muttered. "What kind of pirates can do anything meaningful to a wall that big..."

Really, it was the wasted effort that offended him.

* * *

><p>"...sometimes, I hate it when this happens," Eragon said absently.<p>

I've never understood when things like that happen, Saphira agreed. _Why, and how, did your cousin just capture Terim single-handedly?_

"Because he's Roran, that's why." Eragon sighed. "It's never made sense to me either. You wait, he's going to turn out to have _bragged_ his way in or something."

* * *

><p>11.10<p>

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><p>The harpers bowed to raucous applause, their set finished.<p>

Jaxom nodded to each of them in turn. It was good of them to come to his confirmation hearing â€" though, really, with Lessa in Benden and F'lessan Impressed there was never any real doubt. At least Ruth was a _small_ dragon.

I'm larger than Faranth and Carenath, you know, Ruth interjected.

I do know, Ruth, Jaxom sent back fondly. Then he noticed Menolly was staying on the dais.

Beauty flapped to her shoulder, and she gave the queen fire-lizard a loving caress before turning to the interested crowd. Behind her, a grinning Piemur lugged an odd-looking instrument on stage, like a piano keyboard without the body of the piano.

That looks like a synthesizer, he sent to Ruth, interested.

"It is," Sharra said next to him. Jaxom turned to his fiancÃ©e, and she gave him a smirk. "Well, Menolly wanted to try with just the

violin, but I convinced her it needed something more for the full impact."

"That _what_ needed the full impact?" Jaxom asked.

"Well, I _did_ ask her to play this here," Sharra said. "She arranged it a few loops back â€" Ruth and I were Awake, you weren't."

"Oh?" Jaxom gave her an interested look, then turned back to the stage. "So, specially for this event?"

"Not really." Sharra shook her head. "It's specially for _everywhere_."

That seemed a bit like a contradiction, to Jaxom.

Menolly began to speak. "This piece is a modified version of a very old one. It was written for the composer's beloved home meadows, but I think it belongs here. Here â€" and everywhere. My version is called _Beauty Ascending._"

That said, she raised her violin to her chin, and began to play.

The violin rang out into the open Gather square, and the remaining sussurations of talk ceased. All eyes and ears turned to the Journeywoman Harper on the dais.

Beauty opened her wings, and took off into the still air. She rose slowly, dancing in the air, her voice rising and falling as an integral part of the piece.

About three minutes in, the final component of the piece began to cut in. Piemur's little synthesizer must have had some very big speakers concealed somewhere, as it produced beautiful soaring strings and trumpets as accompaniment to the main violin with practically no distortion whatsoever.

All told, the piece took nearly fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes in which practically no-one dared breathe, as Menolly's version of _The Lark Ascending_ rang in the skies over Ruatha Hold. Giving the truth to Menolly's words â€" no matter where it had been written, it belonged everywhere.

Menolly finally ran her bow along the strings of the violin one last time, then took her fingers off them and lowered the instrument.

Beauty's golden speck in the sky hung there for a moment, then slowly descended to land on her outstretched arm.

Then the applause started.

* * *

><p>11.11<p>

* * *

><p>"Got to love early-loop Berk," Hiccup said, with perhaps just a hint of sarcasm.<p>

Indeed, Toothless sent back, as they soared overhead under cover of night. _What's the plan this time?_

I've not decided yet. Hiccup stretched. "We could try the old ninja dragon standby, of course..."

I am good at that. Toothless looked down, and frowned. _Hold on a minute..._

With a pair of powerful wingbeats, he shed height and gained speed. _That looks like a sail down there._

* * *

><p>It was. It was quite a strangely shaped sail, actually. And the design of the ship it was attached to was something quite foreign to the sturdy northern European longships built around Berk.<p>

What a piece of Junk, Toothless commented idly from overhead.

Actually, it's a Dhow, Hiccup shot back. _It's probably made by the same people as the ones who make junks, though. Both were invented by the Chinese, and that's definitely a Chinese rig - though I only know that because of the times you were a Lung._

Hiccup trimmed his own sail. _Not sure what it's doing the other side of the planet to where it set off, though. Hold on._

As the other craft ran close-hauled to the wind, Hiccup ducked the boom of his sail and came about to run alongside.

"Hello the ship!" Hiccup called, from the little dory he used whenever he had to take to the seas alone. "You're getting a bit close to Berk!"

"Am I?" asked a voice from inside. There was a pause, and then a bespectacled face in a straw hat and a loud shirt peered over the dhow's rail. "Excellent!"

"No it's not!" called a voice from inside the ship. "Why couldn't we stay out to sea, where it's safe?"

"Because you don't like storms," the bespectacled man replied, smiling to himself. "Er â€" excuse me, can you take us in to Berk?"

"Sure," Hiccup said, nodding. "Who are you?"

The man opened his mouth, paused, and then rummaged through a collection of small books that had been in his shirt pocket. One with a flowing script was discarded, as was one written in Latin and one with what appeared to be Hindi. "Aha! Er... my name is..."

He flipped through the remaining book, which had Chinese characters and runes written on opposite sides of the page. "Tveir-blÃ³m. I think."

Hiccup brightened. "Oh, I know who you are!"

With a grunt of exertion, the young Anchor seized the rail and hauled himself up onto the other ship. "If you're Twoflower, then that must be Rincewind in the Dhow with you."

"Marvellous, you've heard of us," Twoflower said. "I'd love to get a photo of you and all the other loopers who are Awake here, by the way. Is anyone else?"

"Toothless is. I'm Hiccup, by the way" yes, I know, terrible name."

With a quiet splash, the abandoned little dory was lifted out of the water by said Night Fury.

"Let's see..." Hiccup frowned, as Toothless vanished to go return the boat. "What else do I know about you... well, not much, actually."

"I've heard about you from someone," Twoflower replied. "F'lar, actually. Nice fellow. I took a lot of photographs."

"Yeah, Pern is nice." Hiccup smiled. "Wait, though, does that mean you have a dragon? If you've been to Pern, and you're here..."

"It's not a rule, I believe." Twoflower then gave a little wink. "That said, yes."

He raised a hand. "Ninereeds? If you would?"

Abruptly, there was a dragon on the dhow. Quite a large one, and gleaming golden in the dim firelight.

Hello, Ninereeds said placidly. _I am, in this world, what is known as a Fool's Fiction, a kind of dragon which is only there some of the time. Like fool's gold, I think._

"Nice to meet you," Hiccup said, nodding to the dragon. "How does _that_ work?"

"Originally, he was created in an area of high magical influence when Twoflower thought about dragons very hard," Rincewind said, from inside his safety bucket. "Since then, it's got easier and easier to do. I wouldn't say he's been helpful, because all he ever seems to do is carry me from immediate danger to less immediate danger."

"Rincewind does complain," Twoflower said with another wink. "But I think he likes Ninereeds anyway."

Toothless alighted on the only bit of the ship that didn't have Ninereeds on. _Hello, everyone. Aren't you going to introduce me, Hiccup?_

"Right." Hiccup turned to his partner. "This is Toothless. He's a Night Fury, and my oldest friend. Toothless, these are Rincewind, Twoflower and Ninereeds - visitors from the Disc."

Welcome to you all, then. Toothless yawned. _Should we just have our guests play up the tourism angle?_

"That sounds like great fun," Twoflower agreed. "I've never been shown around a real Viking village before."

* * *

><p>11.12 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

* * *

><p>Two dragons and their riders shifted dirt and ash away from one of the taller mounds on the volcanic plateau of Landing.<p>

"Have you noticed," F'nor grinned as he wiped away the remaining loose soil from the first of the AIVAS complex's solar panels, "how many strange visitors we've had the past hundred or so Loops? I'm told most Loops don't get visitors more often than one visiting Looper per three hundred Loops."

"To be honest, I've not put much thought into it," F'lar said. "I just took it for granted as a Loop thing: if you have a dragon in your Loop, you get a trip to Pern."

Or if you ARE a dragon, Mnementh added.

"That too," F'lar shrugged.

"Yes, well," F'nor said, "that'd be all very well... except for how many visitors we've had recently from worlds which didn't really have dragons..."

* * *

><p>"It's bad enough I have one renegade sister, let alone two." Toric snarled, glaring at the short blonde woman before him. "I've already reclaimed Sharra. Now you're coming with me back to Southern and back to the holder I've picked out for you."<p>

A hand reached up to tap the holder's shoulder. "She doesn't want to go with you," a soft voice said.

"And who says she has a voice in the matter?" Toric snarled, spinning round to glare at a very short young man with orange-blond hair.

"Where there is a harper," the soft-voiced man in green said, "there is always a voice."

"Oh, really?" Toric jeered. "Well, we'll see how well your voice speaks against three dragons!" The Oldtimer beasts and their riders tensed.

The harper reached into his tunic and pulled out a recorder, playing six notes in a disturbing minor key.

"Is that supposed to impress us, boy?" Toric asked. He reached forward for his sister... then flinched back as a small whirlwind blew up around her. An identical tornado rose around the harper, growing stronger and dustier until neither harper nor girl could be seen. The dragons, roaring, flapped their wings and backed away from

the miniature storms.

Then the whirlwinds dissipated, leaving nothing behind them.

Thousands of miles northwest, two dust devils formed on the bowl of Benden Weyr. After a few seconds they dissipated, leaving behind them two figures dressed for an entirely different climate than the tall Benden mountain peaks.

"Benden?" the girl said, looking around. "Struck lucky, then."

The boy nodded silently. He hadn't yet figured out how to steer the warp whistle, and in this world it cycled through each of the Weyrs in turn every use... including Southern Weyr, which could have been an awkward destination under the circumstances.

"Zelda! Link!" F'lar shouted from the entrance to the lower caverns. "What the sharding hells are you doing here? I saw you at Robinton's Cove just yesterday!"

"Could you give us a ride back?" Zelda asked. "I need to give my here-and-now brother a piece of my mind. No, check that- I need you to give him a piece of your mind."

Link merely returned his recorder to his pocket. He'd already called too much attention to himself, even if it was in the cause of rescuing princ... er, holders' daughters.

* * *

><p>A Hatching to be remembered, Ramoth said smugly as the other Benden dragons thrummed their welcome to the eggs rocking on the hatching sands. Not one, but two queen eggs.

"Don't be smug, dear heart," Lessa replied aloud. "You shouldn't take credit for a Loop variant."

"And not one, but three Loopers found on Search," F'lar muttered warily. "Two of whom already hear dragons."

"I'm not familiar with these names, though," F'nor muttered. "I thought I was up on the more notorious Loopers... but Nagato? Mikuru? Koizumi?" He shook his head in bewilderment.

"If we'd had time to interview them," F'lar said. "But the Ista Weyr flyers just brought them in an hour ago, while we were all busy greeting our guests. We're lucky to have the names," F'lar said, poking at the hide in F'nor's hand. "All from Nerat Hold. Koizumi's a journeyman harper; the other two are orphans of some kind, wards of the Lady Holder."

"They might not even be Awake yet," F'nor pointed out. "We only know they're Loopers because we know exactly who does and doesn't show up at this Hatching, in particular." He gestured to the undersized egg off by itself, which in a couple of hours had a date with destiny with the as yet un-Awake ten Turn old Lord of Ruatha. Not far from where that Lord and his warder Lytol sat in the stands, Robinton and young Menolly sat and reported on one another's recent Loop experiences. Out of all the incidents that made this particular

Hatching the most important in Pernese history since the very first, all were on course in one way or another except for Brekke's re-Im impressment attempt... which the Benden Loopers had gone to great lengths, as usual, to preempt.

"Well, we'll see," Lessa said. "Two times out of three Jaxom Awakens at Impression; I wouldn't be surprised if it's the same with our guests."

And then the first egg cracked, and for several minutes events proceeded too rapidly for discussion of the Loops.

The first rush of green and blue dragonlings had Impressed when the first of the larger eggs began to rock. At first the motion seemed half-hearted. Then the egg bounced and rolled around the sands in ways that dragon eggs never, ever moved. It was less the determined, instinctive hatching than a frantic, panicked effort of the dragonling inside to get out at all costs. Weyrlings and Holdbred candidates scattered, then trailed along behind as the egg wobbled and rolled faster and faster across the hot sands, plowing past and through the group of girls standing around the two golden queen eggs. At last it slammed into the wall below the stands with a force hard enough to finally crack the leathery shell.

Out of the crack flopped the head of a bronze dragonling. It took a deep breath, shrugged its way out of its shell, then rested its chin on top of the wall with a most peculiar expression. _It looks put-upon,_ F'lar thought, though how a newborn dragon could feel that way he had trouble imagining. Its eyes remained half-lidded, looking for all the world as if its embarrassing entry into the world was no more humiliation than it had expected.

Two of the queen candidates- _unfamiliar,_ F'lar thought, _probably two of the visiting Loopers-_ ran up next to the bronze dragon. The shorter of the two, close-cropped hair and a body similar to Lessa's, reached down and picked up the dragonling's head by the jaw with one hand. F'lar's own jaw dropped. _How strong is that girl?_

The shorter girl's mouth moved, but in the uproar of the Hatching Grounds F'lar couldn't hear anything. Her companion, taller, much more shapely, and much more nervous, bounced on her feet. "It is? Oh, Kyon, thank goodness you're here!" She wrapped her arms around the dragonling's long neck, and its swirling green eyes tinged with a bit of orange.

Mnementh, F'lar thought, _what kind of a dragon name is Kyon?_

Kyon is not his name, Mnementh replied, deeply amused at something.

Then what is his name? F'lar asked.

Well, you see-

At that instant one of the two queen eggs split dead down the middle. Wings spread, pushing the halves aside, and a queen dragonling sat up, elegant and proud... well, arrogant would be a better term for it. Without sparing a glance for the half-dozen girls standing in a circle around her, the newborn queen strode forward towards the

clumsy bronze hatchling and the two girls standing nearby. While the short Looper girl slowly stroked and caressed the hatchling's head, the other girl's eyes widened with alarm as the queen made a beeline right for her. "Oh no... oh my, my, I can't, oh my..."

Then the queen hatchling stood up on its haunches, reached its forelimbs forward, and picked up the taller girl, setting her on its back. As the newly Impressed girl wobbled and struggled to maintain her seat on the hatchling, the little queen took the tail of the bronze hatchling in its mouth and tugged, dragging it behind her with steadily increasing speed towards the weyrling quarters and the waiting food.

The little procession's path- the queen, the bronze, and the two Looper girls- took them right past where the Weyrleaders stood watching the whole affair. Trailing them came the journeyman harper, smiling cheerfully as he paused and bowed in respect to the trio. "I beg your pardon, Weyrleader F'lar, Weyrleader F'nor, Weyrwoman Lessa," he said. "I'm afraid we're a rather unreasonable group..." With this half-apology he bowed again, then trotted off in pursuit.

"Kyon... I've heard that name..." F'lar muttered.

Might I suggest, Ramoth said with some substantial annoyance, _that we make an early claim on either Honshu or Xanadu? And send this 'Suzumiyath' there as soon as she's minimally trained?_ The elder queen's gaze remained locked on the weyrling quarters, where the queen was now eating not only from her own bowl but from the bronze's as well. _Either her, or me..._

* * *

><p>Miles Awoke squinting from the light of hundreds of glow-baskets scattered around the Hatching Grounds. His leg hurt like hell- obviously broken, an all too familiar pain- and his sense of balance kept telling him he was standing on the wall, though which wall kept changing from moment to moment. So what, he thought to himself, _what the hell am I doing on my feet holding a broomstick for a crutch?_

Loop memories surfaced, and Miles understood. A_h, yes. Short for my age, sickly, very different from the other Weyr children. Everything to prove. No novelty there. And I didn't want to miss my first Hatching, lest it be my last one. Anything to get out of the lower caverns. Again, no novelty, except that I don't think I ever wore a white smock while playing Admiral Naismith. Granted, once I wore even less, but..._

Still, it looked like the Hatching had already ended. All the eggs were hatched, the dragons had ceased their thrumming, and the hatchlings and their newly Impressed weyrmates were already making their way to the weyrling quarters.

So, I got myself this far so I could Awaken on the point of failure? Miles snorted. Again, sadly, not a novel situation, considering how many times he Awakened the instant after he fell off that damn wall on the Academy obstacle course.

So there you are, a voice which was not his own echoed in his

head... a voice that was extremely familiar.

"Ivan?" Miles looked around, seeing only a large bronze dragonling not so much striding as slouching its way towards him.

So, Count Lord Auditor Loop Anchor Coz, Ivan's voice remarked, _you needed a donkey and the Loops provided, as usual. But why I have to be Awake for it..._ The dragonling shrugged, looking itself over as well as it could. _Well, at least I look better than a jackass this time, _he admitted. _I'm going to spend a fortune on polish, though._

"Ivan..." Miles let it trail off, reaching down to scratch behind the hatchling's ridges.

Funny, even when you don't say Ivan-you-idiot I can hear it, Ivan replied. _What's up with that?_

"Telepathy," Miles replied. "Dragons and their riders are linked. Don't you have Loop memories or instincts or something?"

You mean you're in my- oh no no no no no no, Ivan's voice gasped. The hatchling lunged to its feet and wobbled towards the nearest authority figure, who was F'lar, who had been watching with amusement from the moment Miles had paused in the entrance to the lower caverns. Hey you! Sir, Ivan's mental voice added belatedly as the hatchling rose on its haunches and pointed a claw back to Miles. _Get him out of my head, __**right now!**_

F'lar couldn't repress a laugh. "More visiting Loopers, I take it?" he asked. "Don't worry, the effect won't last long after this Loop if you don't want it to. For the time being, think of it as an opportunity to get to know what's really in your friend's head."

I know exactly what's in my cousin's twisted little mind, Ivan replied sourly. _And I don't want any of it stuck in mine!_

"Come along, Ivan." Miles tried to pull on Ivan's wingtip, but this proved too much of a demand on his stability, and he toppled to the sands with a grunt. "Dinner's over there," he said with a grunt, trying to hide the spasm of pain that ran up his leg.

The dragonling looked at Miles as if noticing his condition for the first time. _Miles, what were you thinking?_ he asked. _Crazy cousin of mine, doesn't know when to sit down and let himself heal._ Clumsily the dragonet tried to pick Miles up, not having realized yet that its body build precluded a bipedal stance.

"Wasn't Awake yet," Miles grunted, teeth clenched. "And your claws are not helping, Ivan."

It's a good thing the Loops did drag me along with you, Ivan replied, working his dragon body under Miles's arm to support the boy Looper. _How would you get along without me to clean up after your messes?_

"Probably very well, thanks," Miles grumbled. "Or have you forgotten Basilisk Station?"

Now that was not my fault! Ivan whined.

All that's wanting, Mnementh commented for F'lar's hearing alone,
is some popcorn. Rather a large bucket of it in my case.

* * *

><p>"Okay," Flar admitted as the dragons finished clearing away the debris from the door to the building. "So we've had some unusual visitors of late." Pulling a tricorder from his subspace pocket, he verified the absence of tunnel snakes or other vermin and led the way inside. "But it's just the Loops, brother mine. You and I both know strange things are going to happen, and there's nothing we can do about it but roll with the punches."<p>

F'nor cocked an eyebrow, not visible in the dim light of AIVAS's chamber, at the logo on the single illuminated screen. "All right," he said, "so which way do we roll with this one?"

The screen read:

CYBERDYNE INDUSTRIES

>ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE VOICE ACTIVATED SYSTEM
RUNNING EMERGENCY PROGRAM

"I admit," F'lar said, "this is a new one on me."

The speakers built into the walls hissed for a moment; then a group of voices, both genders, multiple pitches, said in unison, _"Lingual shifts have occurred. Please continue speaking."_

"I am F'lar," the Benden Weyrleader said, "rider of bronze Mnementh, Weyrleader of Benden Weyr. This is my brother F'nor, rider of brown Canth. We have come seeking knowledge of the ancients who came to this world many centuries ago."

Gradually the overhead lights came on as the solar panels recharged the computer's ancient batteries. _"Okay, that's good enough,"_ the voices said in a much more relaxed manner. _"You wouldn't happen to be Awake, would you?"_

F'lar and F'nor looked at one another. "You roll first," F'nor quipped.

"Yes, I'm the Anchor for this Loop," F'lar said. "I've met artificial intelligences outside Pern, but we've never had one visit us before."

"Are there any other intelligent computers on your world?" the voices asked.

"No, you're the only one," F'lar said. "In fact, aside from you and some spare parts our ancestors stored away, computers don't exist on our world."

"Really?" All the voices sounded like they were hanging off their chair at this news. _"Are there any armies, navies, that sort of thing?"_

"Currently in the process of being disbanded," F'lar said. "We just disposed of a would-be world conqueror at the start of the Loop,

about three weeks ago or so. No history of standing armies, practically no history of war of any kind over twenty-five hundred years on Pern."

"Are there any weapons of mass destruction?" the voices asked, practically sounding hungry at this point. "Nuclear, antimatter, biochemical, anything of the sort?"

"The ships our ancestors arrived in have a bit of antimatter in their engines," F'lar said. "We're scheduled to use it to shift a rogue planet's orbit in about, oh, twenty-two, twenty-three years from now. Aside from that, nothing worse than our dragons."

"So let me get this perfectly clear," the voices said cautiously. "You didn't build me, I'm not here to help you win a war, there are no robots or superweapons or anything of that sort, and you don't want me to run your government... right?"

"Er... all we want," F'lar said, "is to get a jump on recovering the technology of our ancestors so we can get rid of Thread and return to the cultural level our forefathers intended. We want you as a teacher and a tool, nothing more."

The chamber exploded in a cacophony of music and light. F'lar could pick out Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and "Celebration" out of a half-dozen happy, triumphant-sounding tunes being played simultaneously. The screens displayed videos of fireworks and flags, even a brass marching band. The central screen lit up with a new message: ****CONGRATULATIONS PERN! SKYNET RATES YOU: NOT HOPELESSLY STUPID!****

"F'nor," F'lar said to his brother, "have you noticed how many strange visitors we've had the past hundred or so Loops?"

"Not particularly, no." F'nor couldn't keep the grin off his face.

* * *

><p>11.13<p>

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><p>"Okay!" F'nor said, in his official unofficial role as the One Who Chats To New Riders. "I'm F'nor, rider of brown Canth €" he's over there."<p>

Canth waved his tail.

"I'm sure you're all still enjoying the high from Impression," he went on. "But €" you should know, it's normal for not everyone to be ready for everything involved in having a new personality connected to your own."

He looked at the boys and girls who had Impressed greens. "That's especially true for you lot, as well. M'ren, for instance?"

The indicated greenrider looked startled.

"You, and the other new greenriders, are connected on a deep and fundamental level to a female dragon. That means that, for you boys

who did that, there might be some confusing issues coming up."

He smiled, disarmingly. "Let me assure you all â€" we may not have run into every issue, but we've run into a lot of them. I, as well as my brother F'lar, the Weyrlingmaster, the Weyrsinger... we're all available to talk to. Either have your dragon bespeak one of us, or come see my mother â€" she'll set you up."

A hand rose. "Who's your mother?"

"Manora," F'nor answered. "The fine lady in charge of the caverns. Cross her at peril of bean soup every day for three months."

Chuckles ran around the group.

"Okay, I won't keep you much longer," F'nor concluded. "Go enjoy the hour and a half of rest before your dragons wake up again. Anyone with specific concerns -" he made eye contact with one bluerider, "-should come talk to me when they're free."

* * *

><p>"You asked after me?" asked the young bluerider a few minutes later.<p>

"I did," F'nor agreed. "Come on, sit down. Canth doesn't bite."

I nibble, though, Canth stated.

"He doesn't," F'nor corrected.

The bluerider smiled faintly at the banter, then sat down against Canth's tail. "Thank you for the invitation."

"Not a problem." F'nor leant back as well. "So," he said, after a moment. "How are you finding Pern?"

The boy shrugged slightly. "Alright so far. It's been a bit frantic, really."

"Yeah, things calm down." F'nor stretched. "Some loopers say it's boring."

"I like a bit of down time," the boy commented, scratching Canth idly. The big brown purred.

That feels very nice...

"Whoops, sorry. Should have asked." The boy lifted his hand.

"What was that?" F'nor asked, interested.

"Oh â€" right. It's a side effect of acquiring a new morph."

Further explanation was interrupted rather abruptly as a blue dragon came walking out of the weyrling cavern.

Tobias? It asked. _This is most peculiar._

"Turn it down, Ax," T'bias asked. "You're broadcasting to everyone."

Oh. Sorry. The blue dragon walked over, frowning down at his claws. _This is very unusual._

"Won't you introduce me?" F'nor asked.

"Oh, right. This is Aximili-Esgarrouth-Isthill. He's usually more... well, anyway, he's about as blue as usual." T'bias shrugged. "He's my uncle, it's complicated."

"It sounds it," F'nor agreed, as the young dragon "who he recalled was called Esgarrouth here" completed his careful walk over to them. "Blue?"

I am an Andalite, Ax explained. _I am not from Earth, though I believe that I have become quite good at pretending to be._

He looked down at his claws again. _These are very inefficient._

"Don't blame me, I wasn't on the design committee," F'nor said with a chuckle. "Anyway, welcome to Pern, if you haven't been welcomed already."

He seems very pleasant, Ax said, still broadcasting a bit widely.

"It's all an act, I assure you." F'nor shrugged. "Anyway, let me know if you two have any problems."

* * *

><p>11.14<p>

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><p>Bilbo Baggins crept through the corridors of the Lonely Mountain, towards the chamber that Thorin insisted the Dragon Dread was using as his lair.<p>

The rumbling snores echoing through the whole mountain suggested that, for now at least, Smaug was asleep.

* * *

><p>Eventually he came upon a vast cavern. Lying there, curled into a ball, was a huge red dragon.<p>

And nothing else.

There was no treasure whatsoever, except for a not-particularly-ornate picture frame ten feet high. And the pile of brushes and paints next to it, and the half-finished landscape on it, rather implied that they weren't treasure so much as a hobby.

As Bilbo tiptoed forward, Smaug snorted and opened a single reptilian eye. Which rolled, and then closed again.

Smaug's tail flicked out, pointing to a sign near the door.

Bed-cavern of Smaug the Lazy.

>Do Not Disturb.

>For Treasure, Take First Left After Stairs.

* * *

><p>11.15<p>

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><p>"Dragon!" the guard shouted, running inside.<p>

Thrë́in, son of Thrë́r, caught him by the arm as he went past.
"Dragon?"

"Yes," he confirmed, eyes wide. "It has wings a hundred feet and more long, it is a baleful red and fire seethes within! It will kill us all!"

Thrë́in released him, and hefted his axe - the ancestral weapon of his bloodline. If he had to run, he would, but he would at least see the wyrm first.

A deep voice rumbled. "Excuse me?"

Thrë́in blinked. "Yes?" he called, warily. They said wyrms could enspell lesser beings with their voices...

"I'd like to talk to you about Eru."

With a thumping and cracking of stone, the dragon's head and fore torso came into view. It... seemed to be wearing a well-turned out shirt, like that some of the men of Dale wore, and had a pair of spectacles perched atop a terrible snout.

There was also a nametag, the size of a door, with the legend:
Brother Smaug.

"I was wondering if you'd given your heart to Eru," he continued, in an all too calm voice. "Only those who have will be saved."

"You mean you'll kill the rest?" Thrë́in replied.

"No, I mean eventually. It's all in this book. May I come in?".

* * *

><p>11.16<p>

* * *

><p>Gandalf strode out of Fangorn at the head of the truncated Fellowship.<p>

"We must make haste to Edoras," he said, his clear voice carrying effortlessly. "The shadow moves more quickly, and darkness grows in Isengard."

He whistled, three long warbling notes followed by a pair of shorter ones.

With a great clap of leathery wings, a red shape swept over the nearest swale and alighted in front of them, landing with great precision.

Gandalf leant forward, scratching the newcomer under the chin. "This is Smaugleafearno, the lord of all horses."

Legolas, Aragorn and Gimli exchanged looks.

"Lad, are you sure you came back alright?" Gimli ventured. "That there's a dragon."

"He has been my friend through many dangers," Gandalf rebuked gently. "And is he not a magnificent specimen? No other horse comes close."

"Neigh," Smaugleafearno said unconvincingly.

"See?" Gandalf asked, bestowing a beatific smile on the three warriors.

* * *

><p>AN:<p>

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><p>11.1: To them, it's the future.<p>

11.2: About half of all loopers have probably been here.

11.3: Microdragon.

11.4: He did participate in the great song, after all.

11.5: Rather different to his baseline interaction with a brownrider.

11.6: How very Viking of him.

11.7: An ongoing issue.

11.8: Siphonia. (Based on Chris Wayan's study of what such a world would be like.)

11.9: Don't ask about the military logic involved.

11.10: Vaughn, "The Lark Ascending". Beautiful piece. Really does belong everywhere.

11.11: Rincewind is the only known Anchor who has never died. (Incidentally, he's actually quite good at magic by now -it's just an issue on which he has something of a mental block.)

11.12: It's a trend. (Meet Skynet! Another person who has gained better living through ponies, much like Smaug. Speaking of which,

I'll probably post up how THAT happened next time.)

11.13: "Uncle! Uncle!"

11.14: One way to not be bothered.

11.15: And one way to bother others. He even put on a faint Utah accent, though no-one appreciated the effort.

11.16: Makes sense to me.

12. Chapter 12

Caution: these contain spoilers for the second HTTYD film. There's also a fair bit of pony, because that's where Smaug got his character development.

Note: There are a fair few non-HTTYD loops in this set. This fic will now contain some loops from other dragon-centric settings at times. (Not Spyro, though, that's got its own set.)

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><p>12.1<p>

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><p>"If by my life or death, I can protect you, I will," Aragorn declared. "You have my sword."<p>

"And you have my bow," Legolas said, standing up quickly.

"And my axe!" Gimli weighed in, hefting it.

"And my case of lethal halitosis."

Everyone looked up at the dragon casting a long shadow over the meeting.

"Why are you even _here?_" Elrond asked, not for the first time.

"I like the boy's uncle, that's why." Smaug huffed. "Do you have any idea how hard it is to find someone willing to debate literature inside a mountain?"

He rumbled, not particularly harshly. "Besides, Eriador is too cold for me. I call dibs on Mount Doom. I've been looking for a holiday home..."

* * *

><p>12.2<p>

* * *

><p>"Well, that was easy," Lawrence remarked. "It is a relief not to have to go all the way to Africa."<p>

"Indeed," Temeraire agreed. "I must say, science books are being

extremely helpful."

* * *

><p>12.3<p>

* * *

><p>"Ow."<p>

Astrid flopped onto her back, ignoring the chaos of the loop-start dragon raid. "Seriously, ow."

Astrid? Stormfly asked. _Are you alright?_

I'm fine, Stormfly, just a little startled. Astrid winced.
Seriously, though, that was unexpectedly painful.

I'm sorry... Stormfly replied, her mental tone contrite. _I literally didn't see it coming._

Me neither. Astrid took herself firmly in hand, and stood up - picking up her bucket to go put fires out around Berk. _I hate sector whiteout._

As a joke, Astrid had once commented that it was more likely for Stormfly to hit a mountain at full speed on a clear day than for her to choke on a fishbone. It now appeared that that was literally true.

At least it had been quick - if embarrassing. The clear air and white snow had combined to mean that they hadn't seen the mountain. It had basically snuck up on them.

"Never forgetting my polarized goggles again..."

* * *

><p>12.4<p>

* * *

><p>"Farren?" Hal asked, sitting with a slump in the fliers' mess.<p>

Farren Mariah, his trusted (and decidedly eccentric) second in command, blinked. "What is it, leader-o?"

"What's the bloody point of it all?"

"Ah." Farren poured some beer from the keg. "That, oh glorious Dragonmaster, I ain't got a clue about."

He sat. "Well, ah be flyin' dragons because it's the only thing I seems to be good at, and because it's that or the infantry, and Old Man Mariah didn't raise no suicides."

"I was light cavalry," Hal mused.

"Oh?" Farren blinked. "When was that? Seem to recall you were called

th' dragonmaster before th' war, as well. Bareback flyin' with that beastie Storm, an' all?"

Hal blinked. "Pardon?" Then he nodded. "Oh, er... sorry about that. It's complicated."

Farren accepted that without complaint.

"Well..." Hal sighed. "Sometimes, I wonder if it wouldn't be better to just... up and leave. Fly to the far western continent, leave man and man's wars behind, and... let whoever wins, win."

"If'n you're goin', I'm coming with y'," Farren said promptly.

"Thanks, Farren." Hal glanced out the window, spotting another dragon coming in to land â€" a big black, probably one of the new Sagene fliers posted to the squadron. "But... hells, then I remember the last time I went over the lines. Whole valleys, torn beyond recognition. And I wonder... would it ever end?"

Farren shrugged uncomfortably. "Ain't my place to be speculatin'," he said. "But... well, I'm wonderin' how it'll go when I finally get home. Go back to me ma. I'll kick down the door, dive into the kitchen, take cover behind the counter and look out for any snipers, drop the first hostile through th' door with me crossbow, and shout 'Ma! I'm home!'"

Hal chuckled dutifully.

"Yeah, I can't imagine fitting in either. My family were miners, and-"

He paused, then stood. "Well, bugger."

Without another word, he strode out the door.

Farren wondered about what had just happened, then picked up the beer with a shrug â€" just as someone burst in. "Roche raiders! Everyone in the air!"

"Y' what?"

How the dung had Hal known?

* * *

><p>"Left!" Hal called, and Storm dutifully folded in one wing halfway. The big green slipped sideways, and a black dragon's horns jabbed at where his breast had been.<p>

Hal pulled a gun from his webbing and shot the rider in the face.

"And frak you very much, too!" he shouted, firing twice more at the dragon. Stung, the beast flinched, and accidentally dove below treetop height to his death.

Storm clawed for height, snapping at a Roche red which tried to cut across him.

Hal shook his head, most of his attention on the muzzle of his gun as he tried for a deflection shot.

Sometimes it's not even worth getting philosophical, he thought distantly.

BLAM.

"Damn!" he said as the shot went wide. "Okay, you're next. Storm â€" zero-deflection!"

His faithful green dragon growled, wings slamming, and accelerated up behind and below the Roche dragon. Hal judged the timing, and snapped off a zero-incidence shot which caught the red at the base of one wing.

Dumping his spent brass, Hal snapped two speedloaders into the revolver and looked around for another target.

He'd been trying, he really had. It was just hard to try and respect all life when a lot of it seemed to be trying to kill him specifically.

* * *

><p>12.5<p>

* * *

><p>"Pilot Ikari," Rei began. "What has altered to create this variant loop?"<p>

Shinji shrugged. "Like I know. Shouldn't you be able to tell using your weird half-Angel AT field powers or something?"

"Pilot Ikari, referring to my abilities as 'weird half-Angel AT field powers' is racist." Rei paused, then went on. "Tabris is significantly better than I am at determining the source of an anomaly. All I am able to determine is that this is a variant."

"Yeah, and we could both tell that," Shinji agreed. "No Sachiel."

"The flamethrowers larger than many small office blocks that have been installed on unit 00 may be a useful indicator, though," Rei added.

"Wait, what?" Shinji sat up. "Okay, now _that_ sounds cool. Unless we're fighting Titans, then it's just going to smell bad."

* * *

><p>"So, what did you do then?" F'nor asked. "You know, when you found you were fighting Thread?"<p>

The brownrider relaxed back on his chair. They were off-shift on the Enterprise at the moment, and â€" with the crew seemingly half Looper â€" were taking the opportunity to catch up with fellow loopers in

Ten-forward.

"Well..." Shinji winced. "Six words. Rei set the stratosphere on fire."

"...huh." F'nor took a sip of his drink. "So, how did that go?"

"Surprisingly well," Shinji replied with a shrug. "Sure, the smoke choked the sunlight out of the air, but all the firelight replaced it pretty well â€" the net result was just a bit dingy."

"I think I know a guy who'd find that pretty homely, actually." F'nor glanced around. "Not sure if he's here... interesting guy. Has an antimagic weapon and a minidragon, and he's quite a gourmet."

"Sounds worth a chat," Shinji agreed. "You should have seen Gendo's face, though, when he realized what Rei had done."

"Annoyed?" F'nor asked.

"Nah, that was one of the times Dad wasn't a complete bastard," Shinji continued. "No prospect of getting Mom back, so he just dove into his work. I've actually got a picture of it, because it's one of the few times I've seen him _hug_ Rei."

F'nor blinked. "Can I see?"

"Sure." Shinji rummaged for a few seconds, and produced a large printout of a photograph. "Rei was as startled as I was â€" look at _her_ expression!"

"She has one?" F'nor hazarded.

"Exactly," Shinji confirmed.

* * *

><p>12.6<p>

* * *

><p>"I've wanted to do this for a while," Jaxom explained. "It'll be fun. Seriously."<p>

Just make sure you get it all worked out, Ruth replied tartly.

"Did them already." Jaxom passed around some paper handouts, which the various other loopers took.

"Hm." F'lar looked them over. "Okay, Jaxom. If no-one has any complaints, we'll give it a go."

* * *

><p>Dragons of the Pernese type are telepaths.<p>

They are also teleporters.

And, as a third prong to their abilities, they are telekinetics. Some of them are quite powerful telekinetics.

Ramoth, Mnementh, Canth, Ruth, Path, Golanth and Wirenth, all working together, were between them sufficiently powerful to slow a very large incoming comet down to come to a stop relative to Pern, and then make it go flying back out into space or otherwise not hit the planet below.

Jaxom, on the other hand, was sufficiently eccentric to come up with the idea of making it stop in the atmosphere " at only a few kilometres up.

And making it do that over Ruatha hold.

And, finally, to make it reach perigee at the exact moment he swung a baseball bat.

* * *

><p>"That's one for the photo album, I think," Jaxom said some minutes later, admiring the result. "Think I should have been wearing sunglasses?"<p>

Sharra shook her head, grinning. "You are nuts sometimes."

"And you love me for it," Jaxom replied easily.

* * *

><p>12.7 (from MLP Loops)<p>

* * *

><p>"I am Smaug the Red!" The huge dragon leaned down close to Spike's nose. "I am without equal! My armour is as battle steel, my teeth are swords without peer, my claws like manifold diamonds, my wings bear terror aloft with the force of a tornado, the shock of my tail cuts all defence, and my breath the ruin of nations! I have burned Napoleon's Europe and slain five hundred dragons in the doing. I alone spread fire and destruction across Deraine, Sagene and Roche, with neither the puling Anchor Kailas nor his pet Storm able to stop me. Neverwinter was but windblown ash by the time I left it. I have incinerated Corellia in a day and a night, defeated the mightiest battleship of the Imperium of Man, and destroyed the Volturi and all their kin!"<p>

"And yet," Smaug's enormous head snaked still closer to Spike, sniffing him once before drawing back in disgust, "here you are. A whelp, a hatchling, nursed with the milk of lesser beings and their ideals! Who are you, to dare to call yourself a dragon? Who are you, to think you have the right to challenge me for my hoard? To deny me the right to be what all dragons should be?"

Spike looked back up, taking a single quick breath, and then exhaled deeply and evenly. "I am Spykoranuvellitar, known as Spike. I do not challenge for your hoard, because I have no need for it."

"Blatant lies," Smaug declared, rumbling. "All dragons need a

hoard."

"Storm, that you mention, has no hoard beyond the love of his rider." The larger dragon snorted his contempt, but Spike continued.

"Toothless, who you may have met, is a partner with his rider. Temeraire, who you must have met, sees his hoard of gold and gems as important " but mainly for where it comes from, and specifically for who it comes from."

Smaug frowned. "Pretty words, youngling. But why do you not need my hoard?"

"I have a better." Spike straightened his shoulders. "For me, no gold nor gems compares with my friends. They, and their love, are my hoard in truth."

"Truly foolish." Smaug blew a jet of fire into the cavern, which licked around a stalactite and made it glow cherry-red. "Love of lesser beings... no gold... how can you even claim to be a dragon?"

"Dragons aren't mindless beasts," Spike said, and didn't react when Smaug roared laughter. "We're intelligent, just like humans or ponies or dwarves. We can choose to follow our instincts or not."

"But why should we not?" Smaug pressed. "Dragons are the greatest creatures in existence! I do what I will, and none can gainsay me!"

"Then you're not a good person." Spike shrugged. "Being a dragon doesn't mean you're immune to morality. It means you're powerful " that's all."

Smaug's teeth clashed together no more than a foot from Spike's muzzle. "I am powerful!" he roared, shaking the cavern. "You are a mere wyrmling who consoles himself with the affection of nothings, who has no hoard worthy of the name, who comes before me alone and presumes to lecture me on what a dragon is!"

"I do presume." Spike nodded. "I presume because, for all your might and majesty, you're really kind of sad."

Smaug blinked, actually unable to believe someone would dismiss him that thoroughly.

Spike pushed on into the pause. "Your wealth is measured in gold, in gems, in treasure and in vanquished foes. But I can ask my friends for help, no matter the time or the place, and get an answer. I have a wife, who I love and who loves me. I have others, and that's one thing you don't have. You're alone, atop your hoard, in a splendid isolation... and yet, more than anything else you want someone to share it with. To tell them how wonderful you are, because it always rings hollow when you tell yourself."

With a tiny flash of blue light, a ring appeared on Spike's finger. It was made of a bluish metal, surmounted by a diamond, with a tiny fragment of shining red within it. "This is my most valuable possession. Not because of what it is, but what it signifies."

"That is the thing you have which holds most value?" Smaug repeated,

softly. "Then I desire it."

Spike looked up, frowning. "Why? I mean, it's my wedding ring... That's why it matters to me."

"Because you have it, and I do not." Smaug spread his wings. "I demand it, because it is the right of the strong to take what they wish from the weak. If you do not wish to cede it, then show me what real strength your wife may grant you!"

Smaug inhaled massively, causing the gems in his hoard to clink and rattle with the wind he produced. His neck reared back, and he breathed out a massive gout of red flame directly upwards â€" shot through with orange, and yellow, and cones of bright blue.

The entire mountain exploded.

* * *

><p>Twilight jumped as the sound of a mighty explosion reached her, and rushed to the window.<p>

All over Ponyville, heads were poking out of windows and ponies out on their afternoon shopping runs turned towards the Everfree Forest.

Twilight followed their gaze, and gaped. That pyrocumulus cloud must be half a mile high!_

Why is there a volcanic eruption going on in the Everfree?_

A colossal red shape exploded out of the cloud, extending vast wings, and performed a sharp hairpin turn before launching a lance of white-hot fire directly downwards.

Twilight blanched. Spike had gone off in that direction for 'a chat' with the dragon of the Everfree... but that certainly was not the dragon of the Everfree. What was going on?

A holodisc clattered to the table behind her.

Snatching it up with her magic without taking her eyes from the wyrm, Twilight triggered it.

The sound of an explosion came through, followed by a cough. "Spike here, Twilight. Everything's under control-"

A loud slam came next. Looking at the hologram, Twilight saw that Spike had just barely avoided a rock the size of a house from landing on him.

"Well, sorta... that's Smaug. Don't worry, I'll handle him â€" just make sure we don't wreck everything nearby in the process."

The message ended.

Twilight felt frantically for her element-sense... still two Loyalty elements active. Since one was the (unawake) Dash, that meant the other had to be Spike.

Still, what the _buck_ was going on?

She began composing her own messages. One each to Shining Armor, Celestia, and Luna, asking for their help in keeping the devastation localized.

* * *

><p>With a hissing roar, the lance of plasmated air focused in from ten feet across to a single inch, and Spike's blue lightsaber drank it up without much more than a flicker.<p>

Spike mentally shuffled through his Pocket contents, trying to find what it was he'd need. One set of Rarity-quality robes â€" as flammable as a granite tor, thanks to the fact they were made out of woven diamond and sapphire â€" and the shield that Shining had made him once. It might not be a particularly 'jedi' thing to have, but it was at least large enough to hide behind in a pinch.

"Do I see a knight in shining armour?" Smaug laughed, then continued in a tone of heavy sarcasm. "Truly a true dragon, to wield weapons to fight rather than rely on tooth and claw and flame!"

Spike squinted upwards, trying to see through the smoke, and reached for the Force. It was there in a moment, a strong cable of blue and white light, and he drew on it gladly.

The shield snapped up almost of its own accord, driven by a flash of precognitive insight, and a blast of wider, less focused fire splashed off it like rain.

"An impressive trick, hatchling!" Smaug said, chuckling. "But inadequate."

The Force warned Spike of danger, and he leapt clear-

Smaug unleashed the full force of his fire.

The ground where Spike had been standing simply melted. Everything within ten yards of the impact area became a puddle of lava, and the force of the blast cracked the rock around it in a crazy pattern of broken and crumbling pieces.

Spike landed badly, blown off his impact point by the sheer impact of the concussion, and sprawled before rolling upright.

* * *

><p>"Twilight!" Shining called, galloping into the library. "What's going on?"<p>

"Spike's in a fight in the Everfree," Twilight summarized. "I need-"

The Royal Sisters materialized in the kitchen. After a sneeze as Luna's wings hit Celestia's nose, they were sufficiently untangled to move into the main room.

"Right." Twilight started again. "I need you three to help me throw up a shield around the Everfree. Spike can handle himself, I'm fairly

sure, and the best way we can help him is to make sure he doesn't have to worry about us."

"What caused this?" Celestia asked, already channelling magic to supply Twilight with.

"Spike went off to... I think he said to try and recruit the Dragon of the Everfree for some support group, or something. But-" Twilight winced as the ground shook. "It turned out to be Smaug from Arda, instead. And he's Looping."

Luna's expression hardened. "Right. We shall aid gallant Spike in defeating this-"

"No," Twilight shook her head, building the shield spell. Her brother pitched in, layering his own spellforms on top of hers. "Spike said he could handle it. I'm willing to let him have a try."

Celestia looked at her for a moment, then nodded. "Indeed. He isn't a child any more."

"He hasn't been one for a long time," Twilight agreed. "Right, that should hold. I'm going to start evacuating the wildlife."

* * *

><p>Right, I'm fighting Smaug. The Dragon Dread. The Chiefest and Greatest of Calamities.

Spike raised his shield, blocking a blow from Smaug's tail. The knife-bladed appendage glanced off and scored a long furrow in the bedrock, and Smaug laughed.

Smaug the Impenetrable. _Well, there's one that didn't turn out to be true..._

He jumped again, drawing on the Force, and shot across from one side of the cleared area to the other. Slipping his shield back into his pocket, he drew a yew longbow and nocked an arrow.

A moment's concentration, and he let it fly.

The arrow flew straight and true, striking Smaug's scales right over his heart, and glanced off. Smaug grinned, baring his teeth, and hovered above the smaller dragon tauntingly. "You think me a fool, to fall for the same trick more than once?"

"It's worth a try." Spike shrugged. "Besides, I like archery."

He drew back a second arrow and released it.

Smaug spat flame at it, and it erupted in a blast of unbound magic. "I am not blind, hatchling!"

Between one word and the next, Smaug released his Dragonfear.

Spike felt a wave of atavistic terror stab through him. Intellectually, he knew what it was â€" clearly Smaug had picked up a few supernatural tricks from his time in Faerun â€" but Dragonfear didn't answer to rationality.

"Look at you, cowering before me," Smaug said softly, landing before the shivering purple dragon. "Defeated, as all are before me. Smaug Unconquerable, Smaug the Magnificent."

There is no emotion; there is peace.

There is no ignorance; there is knowledge.

There is no passion; there is serenity.

There is no chaos; there is harmony.

Spike stood, looking Smaug in the eye.

There is no death; there is the force.

"It'll take more than that."

With a gesture, he replaced his lightsaber in his subspace pocket. "Believe it or not, I don't actually want to kill you."

"You? Kill me?" Smaug shook his head, a dangerous orange light building behind his teeth. "I think it is not I who must fear that."

Smaug fired another blast of full-power dragonflame directly at Spike. This time, he didn't dodge.

* * *

><p>Twilight shielded her eyes against the flash of blue-white light.<p>

"Is he okay?" Shining asked.

The younger sibling just smiled.

* * *

><p>Smaug blinked. "I must admit, that has never failed to work before."<p>

Spike shrugged, as the molten rock around him began to cool to obsidian. "I'm a dragon, remember."

He jumped, and kept going as wings snapped out from beneath his robe. Smaug spread his huge wings, and slapped the air to follow.

* * *

><p>Thank you, Fluttershy and Dash! Spike thought with the small corner of his mind not focused on keeping ahead of Smaug. The larger dragon was a powerful flyer, but Spike had both technique and agility on his side. The former thanks to his fellow Element of Loyalty, the latter because Fluttershy had finally worked out with him how he could shift wings out of proportion to his size. More area meant more manoeuvrability.

Fire blazed through the air around him, and spawned savage upcurrents

which clawed at his airflow. With a thought, he spun Smaug's latest dragonbreath into a single compressed ball of energy, and absorbed it to heal a few minor wounds.

Twitchy tail, the Force whispered, and he dove out of the way of Smaug's claw as it tried to smash him from the sky.

* * *

><p>"That's kind of impressive..." Twilight said, quietly, as Spike did an aileron roll (without ailerons) and spun away from Smaug's dragonfire. The plasma burst hit her shield, which rippled but coped with it quite nicely. "I wonder why he's Looping..."<p>

"Well, assuming the admins were responsible at all, they're not exactly infallible." Shining nodded to her, and she winced, remembering a few examples of less than perfect planning. "And he's kind of a major player in the book."

Twilight shaded her eyes from another flare. "True. But if we've got the job of clearing up again..."

Right. Spike executed a Kulbit, shedding speed so dramatically that Smaug overshot him entirely, and slowed to a hover. _No more tactical retreats._

"I thank you, hatchling, for giving me such an exhilarating chase," Smaug said in a conversational tone. "Nevertheless, I also thank you for simplifying my task. Now, hold still so I do not destroy that ring of yours when I destroy you."

Spike inhaled, and blew a thin jet of green flame as Smaug unleashed his own roaring inferno.

* * *

><p>"Whoa!" Shining said, dancing backwards a step as a cone of flame erupted from the apex of the shield dome. "Did it just fail?"<p>

"Nope." Twilight's voice was smug. "I think he listened when we discussed tactical use of teleportation. He's flame-sending Smaug's own fire."

* * *

><p>The flame-jet died down, and Spike grinned impudently. "No luck there."<p>

Smaug stared fixedly at him for a second, and then his tail lashed forward like that of a striking scorpion.

Spike moved smoothly aside, with all the time in the world, and took hold of the tail just behind the flat spade. With careful precision, he pulled just before Smaug reached maximum extension and caused the wyrm to sprawl forwards in the air.

Courteously, he waited until Smaug had recovered his equilibrium.

Another fireblast came his way. This time, Spike held out a palm, and enclosed the fire in a blue globe of Force energy. Bringing it to his muzzle, he ostentatiously blew it out.

Smaug growled, smoke seething from the corners of his mouth, then lunged forward with shocking suddenness and bit down on Spike-

Tried to bite down.

Spike bared his own teeth in a fixed grin as he held two of Smaug's fangs, one in each paw, while pushing down with his feet to keep the mouth open.

Strength of the earth, sugar. Ain't nothing like real earthbendin', but you hold your stance and it ain't trivial to move you.

For fully ten seconds, he held Smaug's jaws open, then gathered himself and _pushed_.

Smaug resisted for a moment, then let his mouth hang open and began coughing. Spike dropped free, performed a wingover and hovered once more in front of Smaug's nose.

He shrugged. "Well?"

Smaug looked at him with half-lidded eyes full of hate. Then smiled. "So, your friends give you strength, do they?"

The huge red dragon... vanished.

Spike blinked, then gaped, turning towards Ponyville " where Smaug had reappeared, _outside_ the shield, and was already inhaling.

* * *

><p>"Oh, cress!" Shining blurted, realizing the magnitude of the disaster. "Tw! Quick, move the-"<p>

Twilight's horn was already glowing, building a new set of shields over Ponyville. It would be a race to see who was ready first.

Then her first shield shattered like glass.

Spykoranuvellitar of Equestria, already a hundred feet long and swelling every second, hit Smaug the Red like a horizontal meteorite. The abruptly _smaller_ Ardan dragon was body-checked clear across the town and floodplain, and impacted on a nearby mountain with Spike's paws still on his side.

* * *

><p>"Let me make one thing very clear," Spike rumbled, his tone deceptively soft. "You don't hurt my friends."

Smaug made a funny wheezing sound, a little like a punctured accordion. This was probably because Spike was sitting on his torso.

"I meant everything I said before," Spike added. "I _do _think you're lonely, I _do _consider my friends to be the thing I most prize, and

I _didn't_ want to kill you. I still don't," he said, contemplatively. "But you're certainly making it _tempting._"

"I... surrender," Smaug gasped out. "My life and my hoard are yours. Do what you will."

Spike looked down at his erstwhile opponent. "I make you a gift of your life. Do not squander it."

"Why?" Smaug asked. "Why would you just..."

The purple dragon shifted, taking his weight off Smaug. Then he sighed. "Hay, I dunno. Maybe it's because you're kind of what I could have become."

Smaug looked blank.

"Way back in the baseline, I had this... breakdown, I guess, where I went mad with greed. Grew to a huge size â€" like this, but not controlled properly â€" and started to rampage. I didn't hurt anyone, not seriously, but that's more luck than anything... and Rarity pulled me out of it, in the end."

"Rarity..." Smaug repeated. "Is she the wife you spoke of?"

"Yeah, though she wasn't then. It took hundreds of years for us to start going out â€" we took it slowly, for good reason." Spike smiled briefly, then let it fall off his face. "Anyway, I kind of see you as what I might have been like without her to save me. Consumed by the desire for more wealth, more concerned with what you could get than what you already have..."

Air hissed through Smaug's nostrils.

"And desperately alone, as well. I read the book â€" you were the last of the dragons on Arda, weren't you?"

The red dragon nodded reluctantly. "I was indeed, after the death of Ancalagon the Black."

"And I bet you spent a lot of time with him next loop, didn't you?" Spike asked, earning an even more reluctant confirmation. "Besides, it's kind of a rule around here. No-one gets written off."

After a long moment of silence, Spike rolled fully upright. "Right. On the understanding that you don't try to kill anyone for the rest of the loop, I'm willing to return your hoard to your control. Further, if you will pledge to refrain from killing where not necessary, I will teach you how to carry objects _between_ loops."

Smaug's eyes snapped up. "How to...?"

Spike nodded, concealing a smile. _Gotcha._ "I also request â€" _not_ require â€" that you talk to a friend of mine, by the name of Fluttershy. She is a shapeshifter â€" a Druid, in Faerun parlance â€" and understands the workings of instincts. I think it would be helpful for you."

Another long pause. Then Smaug slammed a claw into the rubble.

"Alright! I agree, curse you!"

Spike beamed. "Nice doing business with you."

* * *

><p>"I see..." Fluttershy said, scribbling some notes down on her pad of paper. "Yes, I've seen that before in created metabiological bauplans. It's a classic case of imperfect construction of instinctual-sapience balance, which means your intellect is unable to properly balance the conflicting requirements of your baser wants and needs."

Smaug growled, two jets of smoke curling up from his nostrils.

"Don't take that tone with me!" Fluttershy admonished. "Or you won't get a lollipop after we're done. Now, as I was saying, this doesn't mean that you're inferior in any way. After all, it's hardly your fault, and this kind of problem is resolvable with a course of treatment."

The pegasus finished writing, and ripped a sheet of paper off the pad. "Right, that's my diagnosis for the physical side. Now, tell me about your mother."

"My mother? My mother was the very living rock of Arda itself, and when I and the other dragons were spun from the earth we left it base and dulled!"

Fluttershy nodded. "I see. And how does that make you feel?"

"Superior," Smaug stated bluntly.

"Right, let's start there..."

* * *

><p>12.8 (from MLP Loops)<p>

* * *

><p>Twilight Awoke, and looked around.<p>

It was the later end of her normal start position spread, by the looks of it... she was in the library, just before having Spike write the note to Celestia.

Well, no reason to mess with the classics. Even if Spike had given her the nod they always shared when he was Awake.

Just as she inhaled, though, a voice spoke over her.

"Write this down, minion!"

"I am _no-one's _minion, unicorn whelp," a male voice slightly higher than Spike's tried to snarl. (The high pitch was a serious impediment.)

"Write it down anyway," continued the first voice. Twilight recognized it, and started to get a sinking feeling.

"Dear Princess Celestia," Trixie Lulamoon continued in the room next door, "We have uncovered incontrovertible evidence that your sister... let's call her Moonbutt... will return shortly. Do you want her exploded, set on fire or cured?"

Twilight and Spike shared a confused glance.

"...you might be tolerable," the other male voice admitted grudgingly. "_Sending_"

The Anchor and her adoptive brother walked through the connecting doorway. "Hi, Trixie, who's your-" Twilight began.

Spike held out a paw, stopping her. "Loop memories, Twi!"

"..._oh_"

Twilight Sparkle was one of Princess Celestia's two students, this loop. She and Trixie Lulamoon had each hatched a dragon egg at their entrance exams â€" twin eggs, in fact â€" and been taken in due to the sheer strength of their magical powers.

Twilight had hatched the egg of purple Spykoranuvellitar, known as 'Spike'. And Trixie had hatched the egg of red Smauglaureafeanaro... known as 'Smaug'.

"Well, this could be interesting..." Twilight commented absently. "Anyway. Hi, Trixie."

"Greetings, Twilight!" Trixie replied, turning with a smile. "Have you met my assistant?"

"Both looping and not, yes," Twilight confirmed. Spike nodded agreement. Then frowned, as a loop memory stood out.

"Didn't you two burn down Canterlot Town Hall last year?"

"That was just a fireworks display!" Trixie protested. "Sure, there were three thousand fireworks, and Smaug lit them with his fire, but that's my excuse-"

"_Our_ excuse," Smaug interrupted. "Did I not come up with it?"

"-_Our_ excuse, thank you, and we're sticking to it."

Twilight and Spike exchanged another look.

"We're doomed," Spike opined. "But, on the plus side, it'll look pretty. From, you know, orbit."

* * *

><p>"Right," Twilight said briskly one morning. "As I'm sure you know, Trixie, having been through this all so many times-"

Trixie Lulamoon, Official Unofficial Ponyville Performance Artist, made an expansive gesture. "Of course I know!"

Twilight Sparkle, Official Librarian, nodded towards the red dragon slouched over one of the armchairs. "But Smaug doesn't. So I need to tell him."

"Then tell him, Twilight," Trixie said carelessly. "Why are you bothering me?"

Twilight counted to three. Backwards. From one thousand.

"As I was saying. Smaug, a dragon moves into the local mountain about now, and we have to evict him one way or another. I'm just extending you the invitation in case you want to get involved."

Smaug looked up, closing a book " which Twilight noticed was one of her copies of the Silmarillion. "I accept. I have had enough of this propaganda for one day."

"That's... unsettling..." Twilight mused. "Okay. Hold on while I go get the others."

"Must we?" The red dragon looked at her with dull eyes.

"Hey, remember what I told you," Spike pointed out. "Friends are where strength comes from."

"Yes, but these... they aren't even Awake!" Smaug waved out the window. "How can you maintain such a strong bond with them?"

"Because they are our friends," Twilight answered.

Smaug frowned, but said nothing further.

* * *

><p>"You call this a hoard?" Smaug demanded, striding into the cave as fast as his (short) legs could carry him.

"I do, hatchling," the dragon lying astride the pile of gold and gems answered. He blinked, slowly. "Leave now, before I give you the fate that awaits all thieves."

"You need not concern yourself with thievery," Smaug replied, kicking a golden plate out of his path. "I would not steal trinkets."

"...what did you just say?" With a clattering of coins and a rustle of jewellery, the Old dragon rose from his posture of repose. "You, a mere stripling, come here and lecture me on what a hoard is?"

"All there is in this cave is window dressing." Smaug picked up some coins and let them run through his claws. "It looks pretty, and tastes good, but it has no real value."

With a gesture, he made a gleaming sword appear in his left hand. It was about the right scale for his current size. "This has value. It

was awarded by Thorin Oakenshield, King of Dwarves, for destroying an army of our mutual foes and as payment for the great gem the Arkenstone." Smaug turned the blade, letting filtered daylight catch the runes engraved into it "including four straight-edged draconic runes, clearly a later addition. "This is Orcrist Urulookeanna, and there are none like it."

* * *

><p>"...okay, I'm kind of scared," Spike whispered. "He actually listened to me?"

"From what Trixie can tell, you made quite an impression." Trixie paused. "With his body. In a mountain."

There was a bright flash from inside the cave. Then a roar, rumbling up through their feet.

Then a flare as bright as the sun.

Vantuvir the Black Smoke erupted through the side wall of his cave. Smaug followed, mouth blazing with white-hot dragonfire.

"Ah," Spike nodded. "_This_ I recognize. Aggressive negotiations."

There was an "oooooh" from the Elements, gathered behind them. Another explosion, this time of red-cored black smoke, earned an "aaaaaahh".

"I wonder if this Vantuvir would be willing to participate in my shows," Trixie wondered aloud. "I could go into air shows."

"After today, I suspect he'll demand a protection spell," Twilight said delicately.

* * *

><p>"Why are we out here?" Smaug grumbled, putting the box of dynamite down.<p>

"Well, the Mayor said that Trixie could not test her explosives in town any more, unless she wanted to start paying for _windows_." Trixie shook her head, her face hang-dog. "I had _nearly_ worked out how to make an explosive which would be soundless..."

"...I must admit that the concept is intriguing..." Smaug said, frowning. "How would that work?"

"The sound would be ultrasonic and vent most of the sound-based energy directly upwards." Trixie opened the box with magic. "Right, let's see... one of these was minimizing auditory signature in favour of light signature, and one was the other way around. I can't remember which..."

"Um..." Fluttershy raised a hoof tentatively, and pulled her bright pink earmuffs off one ear. "Why am I out here?"

"Oh. Well, heh..." Trixie winced. "Last time I tried testing these, I summoned an Ursa Minor. So I wanted to have you around to... defuse

things with the local wildlife. No pun intended," she added as Smaug chuckled.

Fluttershy nodded timidly. "If I can help, that's fine..."

She screwed up her eyes, pulled her earmuffs back over her ears, and sat down on the earth with her hooves holding them in place.

"...well, may as well use trial and error," Trixie decided. "Whichever one of these makes a very loud bang, that is from the side of the box I put the loud ones in."

She shot two small spells at the fuzes, which began to hiss. "Fire in the hole!"

* * *

><p>When the concussion died away, Smaug got up (Trixie's idea of 'loud bang' would have done credit to a small volcano, and he'd been knocked sprawling) and looked with appreciation at the blast scarring and the crater.<p>

There was something missing, though. Two somethings.

"...where did you go?" he asked, looking around. The pegasus and the unicorn appeared to have vanished into thin air.

The ground heaved up, and some kind of canine creature that looked like a cross between a warg and an orc dug his way into the air.

"You. Have you seen two ponies?" Smaug asked, facing the newcomer.

It appeared to ignore him, turning to face down the hole it had left. "No more pony. Only dragon."

When Smaug spoke next, his voice had a kind of silky quality. "Did you take them?"

"Of course," the dog-like tunneller said, matter-of-factly. "Ponies pull minecarts."

"Right. _Right._" Smaug took a deep breath, and then exhaled a roaring wall of flame at the luckless Rover.

Before the Diamond Dog could even start trying to extinguish his rapidly burning fur, Smaug was at the hole and blasting it ten feet wide with a lance-like beam of dragonfire.

* * *

><p>"I really need to learn not to do things like that," Trixie said to nobody in particular.<p>

She was _still_ flash-blinded from the explosion, she couldn't hear herself speaking, and while both problems _could_ be solved by going alicorn she didn't feel like explaining everything to Fluttershy.

Besides, she could totally get them out of this once her eyesight returned.

Then the ground shook.

A wave of heat rolled over her.

"Trixie apologizes to her rescuer," she said, as distinctly as she could, "but she is currently not only blind but also deaf. Which way is out?"

Moving air let her know someone was approaching, and then some claws tapped her shoulder lightly.

"Well, this will be fun..." Trixie muttered.

* * *

><p>"So, yeah," Trixie concluded, blinking rapidly. "Smaug led Fluttershy and I out of the complex â€" I assume melting new doorways a few times â€" and then we got back here and you fixed my eyesight and hearing. No harm done."<p>

"Um..." Fluttershy gave Smaug a quick glance. "...thank you, Smaug."

The red dragon shrugged.

"Actually," Twilight said, looking thoughtful. "I have a couple of questions for Smaug. First â€" you didn't kill anyone, did you?"

Smaug examined his claws. "They weren't worthy of that much attention."

"I see." Twilight nodded, still frowning. "And the second question. Why, precisely, did you do it?"

Smaug stopped moving for a moment.

He recovered quite quickly, and affected a relaxed attitude, but the Equestrian Loopers had all seen it.

"Well, I did want a fight â€" it's been a while," he said, shrugging. "And I do owe Fluttershy of Everfree a debt for her help."

Fluttershy frowned. "It was no trouble, really. And-" she caught sight of the clock on the mantelpiece, and winced. "Oh, no. Sorry, Twilight, I need to get back home soon. Angel's hurt his toe, and I need to change the poultice."

"It's okay," Twilight said, shrugging. "Go ahead."

As soon as she was out of the door, Twilight turned back to Smaug. "You know, I don't believe you."

"Why not?" Smaug asked, lip twitching as though it wanted to curl into a snarl. "It has been a while."

"But you just said that the Diamond Dogs weren't worth your attention," Twilight replied. "And it takes considerably more attention not to kill them, if you're actually fighting them."

"Precisely. I put no effort into making them dead or keeping them alive."

Twilight dragged the argument back on track. "But that means this wasn't even a fight, just a rescue."

The red dragon looked mildly uncomfortable. "So what if it was? Rescues are more challenging."

"And this isn't the looping Fluttershy â€" you made just that point a few months ago."

Smaug pressed his lips closed.

"Smaug," Spike spoke up for the first time. "It's not an admission of weakness if you just wanted to help them. Or that you like someone."

"I _don't!_" Smaug snapped. "I..."

He trailed off.

After examining him for a minute or so, Twilight looked away. "If you don't want to admit it, fine. But we're not going to laugh at you if you did."

* * *

><p>"Come on, Smaug," Spike called. "You were hatched on the same day as me this loop, this is your birthday as well!" <p>

Smaug's head rose from the bed. "...birth day? Why is this worthy of commemoration?"

"It's kind of a celebration of the life of the person, as much as anything," Spike replied, frowning. "Being glad that they're a friend, that they're a year older. It's their day."

Spike paused. "Just don't let it go to your head, because if dragons like we are now do that too much then you turn into a huge monster. And that _never_ goes well."

Smaug lay back down on the bed. "I see no reason to get involved."

"You get presents..." Spike reminded him.

A long pause. Then Smaug let out a sigh, and got up. "Oh, very well."

* * *

><p>"Why is there such a tendency for mundanity?" Smaug muttered, looking at the latest present. (Trixie had given him a book about

liquid rocket fuels.) "I am sure that I will eventually read it, but... they are not precious, not valuable, what worth do they have?"

"They're useful, or just nice to have," Spike tried to explain. "Presents are as important for what they mean as what they are."

"Not convinced..." Smaug replied in a low voice.

They looked up at the sound of nearby hooves.

"Um..." Fluttershy began. "Spike, I'd like you to have this."

She reached into her left saddlebag, and pulled out a wrapped package.

"Thanks!" Spike said, smiling at her, and opened it efficiently with a claw. "Oh, nice!"

He lifted the woollen sweater from the package. "Thanks, 'shy. Did you knit this yourself?"

Fluttershy nodded quickly.

"You're really good at it." Spike turned it around, found the base, and slipped it on. "What do you think?"

"Um... it looks good," Fluttershy volunteered. "But I'm sure that's you, not the sweater..."

"Don't be too hard on yourself," Spike waved a hand. "I mean, it is good. Just, you know, don't overdo it either. This thick is fine for me, 'cause dragons don't overheat... hey, maybe you could do these for everyone for Hearth's Warming?"

"...okay," Fluttershy nodded. "Oh, I had something for Smaug as well."

Another parcel came out of the other saddlebag, and Smaug shredded the paper open.

Unlike Spike's one, it wasn't a sweater. In fact, it was a scarf.

Smaug picked it up carefully, unfolded it, and looked at both sides. The pattern wasn't particularly novel, as such "red scales picked out in gold" but the thing which was really surprising was the sheer length.

"Fluttershy..." Spike said, uncertainly. "That scarf has got to be at least thirty feet long."

"Oh, er..." Fluttershy blushed. "I didn't know how long to do it, so I asked Trixie, and she said 'the longer the better'. Then she winked?" The pegasus pushed her hooves together, wincing. "I'm sorry if it's too long..."

"No..." Smaug said, his voice absent the usual sharpness. "This is fine. My thanks."

Fluttershy smiled, though it still looked a bit nervous. "Uh, that's okay..."

The red dragon wrapped the scarf around his neck several times, letting both ends trail down his back. "I am sure I will grow into it."

* * *

><p>"Er... you do know our loop is only about five years?" Spike asked, after Fluttershy had left.

"I do," Smaug confirmed.

"But... does that mean you're going to keep it? I mean, in your-"

"_Yes,_" Smaug replied, in a tone that brooked no further comment.

Wisely, Spike shut up.

* * *

><p>(this section by TricornKing)<p>

* * *

><p>"Spike?"<p>

"Yes Smaug?" said the purple dragon.

"Why am I blindfolded? For that matter, why am I still blindfolded?"

Spike quickly removed the blindfold. "Because of this!" he shouted, spreading his arms out to indicate their current location.

Smaug just looked around, taking in Spike and their friends sans Fluttershy and their location. To his surprise, the ponies were all wearing camouflage outfits. "Why are we in a ditch?"

"Because of that!" Trixie shouted, pointing up at the sky. As the others followed her lead, they watched in awe as the dragon migration passed by overhead.

Spike was serving out tea and biscuits, wearing the pink frilly apron that he had from the baseline. He'd been expecting some kind of snarky comment from Smaug about it, but when he didn't hear anything, he turned to his in-loop brother.

Smaug was just standing there, gazing in rapture at the flying dragons above them. There even seemed to be a shimmer of tears in his eyes. Sidling closer to him, Spike said in a whisper, "Reminds you of home, doesn't it?"

"â€|.yes," said Smaug in a faraway voice. "After the War of Wrath, we dragons escaped to the North to live out our lives. Eventually we all separated and went our separate ways, but for a timeâ€|"

The little red dragon turned his head slightly to Spike. "Tell me, what are the dragons here like?"

Spike grimaced a bit. "In the baseline," he whispered back, "I went after the migration to try and figure out who I was. I met a bunch of teenage dragons who at first gave me a hard time for living with ponies, then accepted me when I belly-flopped onto lava." Nodding at Smaug's wince, Spike continued, "They then tried to induct me into their ranks by getting me to smash a defenseless phoenix egg."

"Why? Did the parents attack them or the migration's hatchlings?"

"Nope. They just wanted to smash it because they felt like it."

A look of disgust passed over Smaug's face. "Killing an unborn hatchling for laughsâ€¦vile."

Seeing Spike's raised eyebrow, Smaug quickly added, "There's no sport in killing the unborn. No glory to it."

"Whatever you say Smaug," Spike said as he turned back to his other friends, a small smile on his face.

* * *

><p>"These traps are stupid!" Trixie shouted, firing an explosive spell at the door in front of them. "My worst fear is _not possible_, that's _stupid!_"

"It showed your worst fear when you tried to open it?" Smaug asked, frowning at the large door. "What did it show?"

"I was alone, on stage, with everyone throwing tomatoes at me, and there was a poster on the back wall saying that explosives no longer functioned," Trixie said, still attacking the door. "It's physically and chemically impossible! I mean, I'm _good_ at performing!"

"...you realize that door hasn't changed in the whole time you've been blasting it, right?" Smaug pointed out.

"So?" Trixie shot back. "It's going to give in one day!"

"Oh, let me do it." The juvenile dragon shoved her none-too-gently out of the way, inhaled, and fired a blaze of white-blue fire with shimmering mach diamonds in the middle of the stream.

The world lurched-

* * *

><p>Smaug lay on a great golden hoard. The wealth of an entire civilization at his feet, blazing in the sunlight filtering through holes high up in his lair.<p>

He was the last and greatest of the Dragons of Arda. Most powerful creature in the world, unconquerable, rich beyond the dreams of lesser beings.

Alone.

Unutterably bored.

Ultimately, worthless, because nothing he did from now to the end of days would change anything or be remembered.

Fated to sit atop the wealth of ages, forever.

Forever alone...

* * *

><p>...aug? Smaug?"<p>

Smaug's eyes opened.

There was a hoof prodding his shoulder, and he was face down on the ground. Something was glowing brightly in front of him.

"What..."

"Are you alright?" a voice he recognized as Trixie asked, concerned. "You blew the door up â€" which, by the way, was _awesome_, I have to Ascend to make that happen â€" and then collapsed."

"I see." Smaug formed a fist, and punched the ground. Then stood, a little shakily. "What now?"

"Uh..." Trixie frowned. "We go through here, there's some stupidly long stairway, and then Sombra shows up. Look, it'll probably be easier if I keep him occupied and you take the Heart, you clearly had a bad reaction to whatever your worst fear was."

"I did not-" Smaug bit off the end of the sentence, growled, and nodded. "You're right. I did. And I _hate_ that."

"Happens to all of us sometimes," Trixie said sympathetically. "I had pretty serious issues with self-worth for a while. Right, we'd better hurry."

As she spoke, her horn glowed. "_Fly."_

"You could do this _all along?_" Smaug asked, warning in his voice as they rocketed along.

"We try to give the authentic experience to anyone who's bored," Trixie replied airily. "I hear Sparkle used the ceiling as a _slide_ the first time, you're actually pretty lucky."

* * *

><p>"Well, I'm stuck," Trixie said in a bored voice, kicking desultorily at the black crystal cage. "Smaug. You'd better take the Heart. I'll hold him off."<p>

"Your acting needs work," Smaug informed her, picking up the Crystal Heart.

"I'm not exactly trying to win an award here," Trixie informed him primly. "And, for my next performance, I will defeat an evil unicorn without moving!"

A shield sprang up around her.

"That means get going," Trixie added. "Off you go."

Smaug rolled his eyes, turned, and set off.

* * *

><p>A black shape of crystal and smoke headed directly towards the running dragon, turning into King Sombra as it did so.<p>

"Let's see if this works..." Smaug muttered to himself, then energy crackled around his claws and teeth.

He opened his mouth, and the fire that issued forth this time was a lance of purple and white shot through with deep red.

He'd learned how to do this a long time ago in Faerun. It was called 'Rebuking Breath'. The main question was whether this Sombra counted as 'undead'... or close enough, at any rate.

After a moment, the flames died down, and he could see the fruits of his efforts â€" the dark unicorn was suspended in mid-air, conflicting energies roiling across his body.

Smaug decided that probably meant 'close enough', and continued running.

* * *

><p>Since they'd been running fairly close to baseline â€" just having Twilight stay with the fake Heart to protect it, and assigning Trixie and Smaug to the task of carrying the real Heart â€" the celebration and stained-glass window and all that followed were quite familiar to Twilight.<p>

She was impressed with the visitor, though. He'd really improved over his time in Equestria, especially compared to the first time he'd turned up and tried to incinerate the place...

Now, however, the celebrations were done, and they were all back in Ponyville.

"Is that the last of the calamities your Loop has for the unwary?" Smaug asked, sitting heavily down in an armchair.

"Not quite," Twilight replied, shaking her head. "One or two more of the same scale, but if you're all stressed out then Trixie and I can handle those."

"Ask me again nearer the time," the Dragon Dread decided.

"Will do." Twilight nodded, then brightened. "Oh, I was going to tell you. We â€" Trixie, Spike and I, as well as Shining and Cadence â€" wanted to let you have first pick of Sombra's treasury, because you

were so instrumental in defeating him.

"...I believe I will decline," he said eventually.

Twilight blinked. "Really?"

"Really," Smaug confirmed. "I believe I have memories enough."

* * *

><p>12.9 (again, from MLP Loops)<p>

* * *

><p>"Behold, I am Smaug the Red!" the huge red dragon roared. "My voice is the clap of a thunderstorm, and-" he paused. "I do not recall Bilbo Baggins being female."<p>

The hobbit below him smiled uncertainly. "Hello, mister Smaug..."

Smaug crashed back down onto all fours, sending coins flying. "Is that Fluttershy I hear?"

"Well... yes, actually." She waved. "Though I'm Flutter Flagons here. How are you?"

"Fine, fine." He gestured around with his head and one foreleg at the cavernous building. "I've gone into politics, as you can see."

"I can." Fluttershy smiled. "Mister Gandalf was quite confused. He didn't expect you to be Mayor of Laketown."

"The election was interesting..." Smaug allowed, unconsciously stroking the scarf wound around his neck. "I donated about half the hoard to Laketown â€" this is the treasury building â€" and got elected in a landslide. Have you met Sir Bard? He's the deputy Mayor."

"I have, yes." Fluttershy looked back at the door. "He seems quite a grumpy guts. So, I hope you're doing better these days?"

"Indeed I am." The red dragon lay back down. "I was dubious at first as to whether I could truly find enjoyment in something other than violence or treasure, but your friends back in Equestria convinced me otherwise and it certainly appears to have worked."

"I'm glad to hear it." The hobbit rummaged in her pockets. "Now, what have I got in my pocket..."

"The One Ring, I assume," Smaug replied, rolling his eyes. "Should I destroy it right now? It would presumably save a great deal of trouble..."

"Oh, that's in here as well. But there's something else everyone in Equestria decided you should have." Fluttershy finally found what she was looking for in her Pocket, and withdrew a shining blue crystal about the size of two fists clasped together.

"Is that the Crystal Heart?" Smaug asked, squinting down at

it.

"Yes, it is. Twilight went and got the one from your loop in Equestria just before the loop ended â€" we take turns carrying it, just in case one of us runs into you." She looked down at it, then back up at him. "Twilight told me that you didn't want a reward, and that's really very good â€" it shows that you've managed to get control of your own instincts. But consider this a well-done present."

Smaug the Unconquerable smiled. "Well how can I refuse? Thank you, Fluttershy."

"Really, it's no problem at all..." Flutter Flagons reaffirmed, putting the crystal down. "Remember to take it with you by the end of the loop."

"I will," Smaug assured her, touching the scarf again.

Fluttershy caught sight of it and smiled, but let it go. Then she gasped. "Oh, I nearly forgot the other thing I came in for! Where's the Arkenstone, please?"

"Oh, that thing." Smaug shrugged his massive wings. "I left it in the Lonely Mountain with the other half of my gold. They're welcome to it."

"Lovely." Fluttershy reached into her pocket, and flipped the One Ring into the air.

A spear of roaring dragonfire, two inches wide and too bright to look at, caught it at the apex of the throw.

Something shook the earth.

A puddle of molten metal landed on the flagstones with a bubbly _hiss_.

"Pleasure doing business with you, miss Fluttershy," Smaug rumbled amicably.

"Nice to see you as well, Smaug."

* * *

><p>12.10<p>

* * *

><p>Footsteps sounded in the great hall of Alagaesia's most mighty ruler.<p>

"Emperor Galbatorix," Eragon said quietly. "In light of the circumstances surrounding my arrival, I am glad you were able to make time to see me."

"I'd be a fool not to," the black dragonrider replied. "What do you have to say?"

In reply, Eragon raised his voice, and spoke in the ancient tongue.

"I, Eragon, rider of blue Saphira, do swear to protect and serve the Empire until my dying breath."_

Galbatorix smiled. "I believe you and I can do business, Eragon, Saphira's rider."

He stood, and clapped his hands. "Bring a table! Two chairs! Meat, bread, wine! And two haunches of cattle. My new right hand man and I have business to discuss... over food."

* * *

><p>"Explain," the Emperor of Alagaesia said icily.<p>

"I fulfilled my oath â€" letter and spirit," Eragon replied. "In letter, because those things were carnivorous monsters who ate people â€" Imperial citizens, at that. In spirit, because if you destroy innocents in trying to find plots against you â€" there will be plots against you. Everywhere."

Galbatorix considered that for a long while.

"I admire your cheek," he decided. "Do not do this again."

"No promises," Eragon said candidly. "Incidentally, I found the rebel stronghold."

The ruler blinked. "You what?"

* * *

><p>"My... *loyal...servant*," Galbatorix sighed. "Sometimes I wonder whose side you're on, I really do..."

Eragon waved his hand towards the plain. "What? The Varden's army is broken, their might shattered."

"Yes, but-"

Another sigh. "You only killed about eighty of them!"

"Jominian attitude to warfare," Eragon explained glibly. "Manoeuvre the enemy into a position they can't fight, then accept their surrender. I actually didn't do it very well at all, I could probably have done it with fewer casualties..."

He trailed off, noticing that the Emperor was about to explode, and waved a hand. "They're beaten. Make them swear not to take up arms in return for concessions, and they're done with."

"And if they simply ignore their oath?"

Eragon smiled. "Then you crush them completely. Clausewitzian that time â€" smash and smash again until the enemy falls apart."

He shrugged. "But it will be abundantly clear, to everyone, that they deserved it."

Galbatorix gave Eragon a long and analyzing look.

"I feel somehow insecure on my throne while you're around..." he commented eventually.

"If it's ever a better idea to get you off the throne than to keep you on it, you come off it," Eragon explained. "Oath, remember."

He gestured at Saphira, whose wings snapped and crackled with a powerful magical charge â€" the same one she'd used to blast through an entire mountain two hours before. "I'd advise you rule well. Saphira and I are quite good at this."

Internally, Eragon felt quite satisfied.

One way or another, he'd cram Vetinari down Galbatorix' throat if it took an entire loop.

It may be better to be feared than to be loved, but it was better to be permanent than either.

* * *

><p>12.11 <p>

* * *

><p>"This is very interesting!"<p>

_I'm sure.

>

>"I've never had speech before! And - and opposable thumbs!" The rider looked suddenly worried. "That is what they're called, right?"<p>

His bronze nodded. _Yes, M'enth or whatever you're eventually going to pick. They are called opposable thumbs.

>

>"Amazing how interesting you find something like that..." M'enth looked suddenly worried. "Wait a second. What about getting everywhere? Am I going to have to walk?"<p>

Assuming I'm not carrying you, yes. Bronze Fallarnon shrugged his still-young wings. _I think this might be a case of the other side of the hold being nicer. I'm not looking forward to flying for hours on end...

>

>"Flying's nice."<p>

Not for hours on end. Fallarnon shrugged again. _We should at least check who's the heir of Ruatha, though. Hope it's Ramoth. If it's Lessa, that could get quite confusing._

* * *

><p>12.12 (Angelform)<p>

* * *

><p>"I wonder how long this loop lasts? These open tournament loops are always a bit random."<p>

Too damned long.

Hiccup look over at the brooding dragon. "What are you so grumpy about? I thought you liked chasing people around with fireblasts?"

_I hate being stuck so close to the ground. I have wings! Why is a four foot wall as impassable barrier!?

"Oh you're just grumpy about Waking Up in an egg."

The currently purple dragon shifted about. _Thatâ€| has nothing to do with it. Hay why don't we go swipe that pirate's treasure map?_

"What makes you think she has a treasure map?" Despite is question the young warrior levered himself up.

_She is a retired pirate. They _always _have a treasure map._

* * *

><p>12.13 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

* * *

><p>"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," Bilbo said, for the first time in a very long time genuinely surprised and baffled by the thirteen dwarves and one wizard in his home. "Granted, literary study is one of my hobbies, but I assure you I put no secret mark on my door that means, 'literary agent.'"<p>

"Of course not," Gandalf said, smiling. "I put it there after our conversation on Monday. I felt you had Awakened to your true potential, and knowing of this unique opportunity and your talents in this regard, I decided to give you the first opportunity at a more glamorous life than trading in groceries."

"Ah." _So, the wizard wishes to play a prank. Very well, I'll play along for now and see what happens._ "Then I believe it would be best if I heard the full story."

"Well." Thorin actually looked a bit embarrassed. "As you no doubt know, our people were exiled from our kingdom under Erebor, the Lonely Mountain far to the east. The great dragon Smaug descended upon us in fire and fury, slaying all who did not flee. He did likewise to the human city of Dale at the foot of the mountain. Since then we have lived in exile, building up such new fortunes as we may, hoping for a day when we might return and reclaim that which is ours."

"And then, a couple of weeks ago, I received a letter from my cousin Dain of the Iron Hills. He had received a messenger from Esgaroth, that is Lake-town below the Lonely Mountain. Smaug had emerged from the mountain and requested a parlay. He is willing to surrender Erebor and all the treasure therein to its rightful lord and return north to the Withered Heath or wherever he might find a new home. In exchange we were to bring him a literary agent to help organize and publish his memoirs." The dwarf lord nodded at the hobbit and added, "That would be you."

Goodness. So is this the wizard's joke or the dragon's? "I beg your pardon," Bilbo said politely, "but I have always been given to understand that the words of a dragon are, well, less than trustworthy. How are we to know this is not some sort of ploy to bring the last of your noble house back to be done away with?"

"What you say is true," Balin added. "And long we have argued with one another over the issue. But there is one indication that for once the dragon is sincere."

"He sent us this," Thorin said, removing a large wooden case from his pack. Inside lay a massive jewel, cut with so many facets that it made even the dim light of Bilbo's fire dance and sparkle like the star of Earendil. "The Arkenstone of Thrain. No dragon would part with it willingly, even for greater gain, if such can be imagined. Yet Dain reports that old Smaug referred to it as a sharp, dangerous paperweight."

"He, er, also sent along a draft of his early chapters," Balin continued. From his pack he withdrew a very large, heavy, doubled-over roll of maps. Written on the back of the outermost map, in very large but elegant letters, were the words: _Thence and Back Again: a Dragon's Odyssey, by Smaug the Golden._

Bilbo's face paled as he realized the horrible truth: _Oh, deary me. Smaug, are you listening?_

I am, a voice in his head replied, filled with amusement.

You're quite serious about this memoirs thing, aren't you?

Very much so. It's about time someone set the record straight, and I'm not going to wait for another Pern loop just so I can get Robinton to do it.

Ah. Quite. _I was afraid of that._ Bilbo set the large bundle on his table, took three steps towards the hallway, peeped a choked, "Nope," and fainted dead away.

* * *

><p>12.14<p>

* * *

><p>"Always wondered what would happen if we did this," Hiccup said.<p>

That is a lie and you know it. Toothless ascended steadily into the sky, wings pumping. _If you'd always wondered, we'd have done this already._

"Okay, okay," Hiccup backpedalled. "Spoilsport."

Toothless made a raspberry sound.

"Yeah, yeah." The rider patted his friend on the back, then unhitched himself from the saddle and let himself slide off.

* * *

><p>Ten seconds of falling, before he was at terminal velocity.<p>

The small fins attached to his boots snapped out, and he used them to steer his downwards plunge.

Nice angle, Toothless commented, diving himself and playing around his rider in the airstream.

"Good to know you approve," Hiccup said through clenched teeth. Then the ground was coming up and he was aiming for the little patch of pink and it grew in his vision so _fast-__

* * *

><p>Whump.<p>

Toothless alighted on the rock, just next to the four-hundred-foot-on-a-side cube of cotton candy in its hole.

I assume you're okay, Hiccup? I mean, the loop hasn't ended.

"I'm okay!" Hiccup said, somewhat indistinctly. "It worked!"

Neat. The Night Fury bent down, and snaffled some of the cotton candy. _It's certainly a tasty way to land._

"Yeah. Er..." Hiccup's voice was now a little embarrassed. "Toothless? I forgot to think of how to get out... I don't float on cotton candy..."

I will save you! Toothless announced.

"You're going to fly me out?"

_I am going to eat every last scrap of cotton candy. _Then_ fly you out._ Toothless put action to words, and started munching. _I hope you have a book down there. This could take a while._

* * *

><p>AN:<p>

12.1: Bilbo has a few contacts.

12.2: Who would have thought all you'd need was a mold?

12.3: Yes, this is a thing. It has caused at least one real plane crash.

12.4: PTSD sucks.

12.5: At the same time, Mnementh and F'lar were flaming Sachiel.

12.6: Howzat! Wait, that's cricket.

12.7: This is how Smaug went from "I wish to discover the melting

point of every substance" to merely arrogant and antisocial.

12.8: And this is the other half of the process.

12.9: I'd vote for him. Mind, he had me at "dragon".

12.10: Got to love exact wording.

12.11: Perspective flips. They're interesting.

12.12: Bastion's design isn't much short of a lawsuit. (from Strife.)

12.13: Well, he did say the Silmarillion was propoganda...

12.14: Do not try this at home. That much cotton candy will rot your teeth.

13. Chapter 13

Note: There are a fair few non-HTTYD loops in this set. This fic will now contain some loops from other dragon-centric settings at times. (Not Spyro, though, that's got its own set.)

* * *

><p>13.1<p>

* * *

><p>"Let's go, Toothless!" Hiccup called. As he spoke, he clipped the last few bits of equipment on his gear. "No Roman invasion fleet can handle us, bud!"<p>

You bet! Toothless replied. _Hop on and let's sink some quinquiremes!_

Hiccup jumped astride his partner.

There was a thud sound, and a pained squeak.

"...oh, yeah, it's one of _these_ loops." Hiccup stood up, and crouched down over the tiny dragon he'd just nearly squashed. "Toothless? You okay?"

I'd call you an idiot, but I forgot too. Toothless squirmed slightly, and then expanded out to his more comfortable size. _Let's forget that ever happened. To battle!_

* * *

><p>13.2<p>

* * *

><p>"This is thoroughly ridiculous," the Dragon Dread grumbled.<p>

"Well, yes," Bilbo admitted, lounging back on a pile of

gold.

"Demeaning."

Bilbo shrugged. "I wouldn't put it that way. In fact, I- I would say, more in the nature of an _experiment._"

Smaug hissed smoke through his nostrils. "Elaborate."

"Well." Bilbo sat up. "The bearer of the Ring of Power. A Guard of the Citadel of Gondor. A Captain of Rohan. And a rugged adventurer bearing Dwarven-made armour" to say nothing of one of the five Maiar known as the Istarii."

"Are you... boasting?" Smaug asked, voice rumbling through the halls of the mountain.

"No!" Bilbo protested. "Well, maybe. A bit."

Smaug chuckled.

"But my point is" my point _is_, the Shire barely bat an eye."

"That's because they're all morons," Smaug opined. "They didn't know who they were looking at."

"I'm not contesting that," Bilbo told him promptly.

"Hm..." Smaug's head turned, like a trout snapping to a fly, and he unleashed a roaring gout of flame up into the high reaches of his treasure hoard.

The sound of running feet echoed down to them.

"They were getting close," Smaug explained. "I warded them off... don't look at me like that, Bilbo, my days of indiscriminate murder are behind me."

"Like ash-blown scraps on the wind," Bilbo agreed. "Remind me which of us simply walked into Mordor?"

"I _flew_, " Smaug corrected. "Though yes, I did melt down the Black Gates. Anyway... oh, fine, it'll leave them guessing."

"Settled, then?" Bilbo asked, and got a nod. "Excellent. Oh, that reminds me."

He threw the One Ring into the air, and Smaug blew it to bits with a blaze of well-aimed dragonfire" enhanced to hellbore intensity from many loops of magical expertise.

"Does Gandalf _know_ we're awake?" Smaug asked, mirth rumbling in his voice.

"He does now," Bilbo replied. "Since you just blew up Sauron. Right, let's go."

* * *

><p>"Lot twenty-seven," the auctioneer announced. "One well-sprung easy chair. Spent many a night in front of the fire, with a lovely mahogany stain, but still as flexible and springy as the day it was made. Do I hear forty?"<p>

Hands raised.

"Mrs Sackville-Baggins. Any advance... on... forty?"

The auctioneer dropped his gavel.

"Get on with it, you daft old coot!" Odo Proudfoot heckled. "We've got only so many hours in the day!"

"D... d... dragon!" the auctioneer shouted, pointing. "Dragon! Run for it!"

Incredulous hobbits turned to look.

Suddenly believing hobbits ran in all directions.

Slamming wingbeats echoed over Hobbiton as the colossal beast descended near-vertically, blowing up a windstorm from his wings as he hovered for a moment and then dropped to earth.

One huge clawed forefoot rested on the village green, another thudded down between two cottages on Bag End, and his rear legs splashed into the pond.

"What's the meaning of this?" a voice said, from the direction of the dragon.

"Well, Master Baggins," replied the terrible voice of the dragon himself. "It seems that they have very little faith in your abilities, here in your hometown."

"I can see _that!_" the first voice agreed, with a humph. There was the clicking of buckles, and a staccato sound of leather on hide, followed by a thump.

A hobbit clad in strange leather gear strode out from behind the great dragon's foreleg.

"Mister Gamgee," the hobbit asked, striding up to a conveniently-placed hobbit much younger than his own age. "What is the meaning of this fooraw?"

"Well... it's the auctioning off of the estate of one Bilbo Baggins," Gamgee said, a little startled. "Seein' as how he's dead, and all."

The dragon chuckled. "Dead? Hardly, he'd have shut up if he was."

"Oh, you know you'd miss me," the leather-clad hobbit replied, throwing a glance back at the dragon. "Who else listens to _you?_"

"True, true..."

"Anyway. This is my house, and none of it needs to be auctioned off! I'm Bilbo Baggins, and I may be late back but that gives you no right!"

"You claim to be mister Baggins?" the auctioneer asked. He looked a little lost, but rallied. "Can you prove your identity?"

"If you don't recognize me, Lotho Grubb, I have a witness," Bilbo said.

"Yes," the dragon added, on cue. "I'm his witness. He's Bilbo Baggins."

"...that all seems in order," Lotho squeaked. "Please make arrangements for purchasing what's already been sold back from those who purchased it."

Smaug reached up under his wing, and dropped a bag of gold the size of a young Hobbit onto the village green with an audible _thud._

"My credit's good," Bilbo said with a nod.

* * *

><p>"Well," Smaug said, some years later. "You win."<p>

"I wasn't aware it was a competition," Bilbo said virtuously.

"Well, true." Smaug blew a smoke ring out over the green. "But, you still win, because this has defied my expectations to a truly spectacular degree."

Their conversation was interrupted by Mr. Gamgee. "Evenin', Mister Baggins."

Bilbo nodded. "And you, Gamgee. How's your son?"

"Samwise? Bless you for remembering him, Mister Baggins. He's up to walking, now. I'll tell the wife you were asking after him. And a good evening to you, too, Mister Smaug."

Smaug chuckled. "A fine day indeed, Mister Gamgee. A fine day indeed."

By now, even the colossal hole which served as Smaug's home drew very little comment. As Bilbo had predicted, the Shire more or less got used to everything.

* * *

><p>13.3<p>

* * *

><p>"Oh, Faranth's first egg..." Robinton sighed, looking out over the court of the Harper Hall. "This is not going to be a quiet loop."<p>

Young singer-journeyman Leman went past his window, his two brown fire-lizards chittering alongside, and carrying something packed up

in a bundle.

"Give that back!" Composermaster Magnus shouted after him. "That's my last proper ink pen! I don't want to have to use quills for this whole loop!"

"It'd do you good!" Leman called back. "I need this for a mission on Southern!"

Robinton sighed again, and his lips quirked.

I know that smile, Zair chuckled. Taking flight, he winged over to land on the Harper's shoulder. _You are just glad that this replacement is so like Piemur._

"Maybe I am," Robinton admitted. "Maybe I am."

"I must admit," a light voice said, behind him. "I've never cared much for the serious loops. All boring."

"Ah, Loki," Robinton smiled, refusing to be flapped. "It's a surprise to see you. Are Hiccup and Toothless here? I know they're your favorite sowers of chaos."

Loki smirked. "Don't worry, they're tag-teaming Morgoth together with your wayward journeyman-spy."

"I did wonder." Robinton stepped over to the cabinet, ignoring the small explosion from outside. "Benden wine?"

"Oh, of course," Loki said, seating himself. "The stuff we have up in admin-space is lovely, of course, but it's... less authentic, somehow."

Robinton glanced past to the door. "I see you brought your children."

"Was it that obvious?" asked the young woman in the doorway. "I thought my local disguise was alright."

"Oh, flawless, dear lady Hel," Robinton assured her. "Your brothers, however, are less adept. Fenrir is clearly a wolf, not a spitbeast, to those who know what wolves look like â€" though the puppy look helps..."

"It's not a look, this just keeps happening," Fenrir sighed.

"Sleipnir forgot to conceal his extra legs," Robinton added, chuckling at the way the Administrator blushed. "And as for Jormugandr... most fire lizards are smaller."

"Sorry!" Jormugandr huffed. "You're lucky I'm not fifty feet long, I have scale issues."

Badum tish, Zair 'pathed.

"So, what brings you here?" Robinton asked, pouring more wine into appropriately shaped glasses.

"Well, partly a desire for some time off," Loki admitted. "You would not believe the headaches we've had to handle recently. Ask Fenrir to tell you about the mess with his substitute some time... anyway, that's about the size of it."

Robinton nodded. "I see."

He took a drink of his glass, and sighed. "Ah, that was a good year."

"What year was that?" Jormugandr asked.

"The next one."

That mainly elicited a nod from the paradox expert.

"Actually, I did have a question," Robinton said, after a moment. "If you'd be so kind?"

"Go ahead," Loki invited.

"Right." Robinton took another draught. "It's about how, in our world, dragons lay so many eggs per clutch, and looping ones have more."

"Ah," Loki said, nodding. "I think I see. You're wondering how that interacts with the child taboo?"

Robinton nodded.

Loki sighed, then stood. "What I'm going to tell you is not correct," he began. "It is, however, a more useful kind of wrong answer than you may already have. Sort of like how â€" are you familiar with Earth philosophical history?"

"Not very," Robinton admitted.

"Right. In the time most people thought there was one element, or maybe four or five, Democritus came up with the idea everything was made of tiny particles. So cheese would be made up of cheese atoms, the smallest possible particle of cheese."

"I see." The Master Harper's quick mind followed the analogy to the conclusion. "So I'm the philosopher, and you're telling me about atoms, because it's not as wrong."

"Precisely." Loki inclined his head, then took another sip of Benden. "They don't make it like this everywhere," he pronounced. "Okay. So, one of the things you should know about Yggdrasil is that, in a sense, everything that was is recorded."

"...I don't follow," Robinton admitted.

"Everything that already existed in the baselines has a place for everything that happens to it â€" a write address, as it were," Loki explained. "It's supposed to be just regular memory, but we're deep in the chain of fail safes by now. Essentially, a person is a soul address which is connected to read-only and write-only memory, resetting is being reloaded from read-only memory, and a looper is when we manage to get them shifted to read-write memory."

Robinton opened his mouth to ask a question.

"Cheese atoms," Loki reminded him.

After a moment's thought, Robinton nodded and subsided.

"That means that anyone who did exist, everything that happens to them in any loop is stored â€" we have a place for it, and it goes there â€" but anyone who is entirely new and not from baseline or from any of the pre-known variants doesn't have an address." Loki rubbed his temples. "This analogy's giving me a hangover and I'm the one making it. Right, so â€" with the dragons and other cases where this has to come up, we cheated. They're other souls from other worlds, who are going to have an interesting time of it when we fix all this."

Sleipnir took up the thread. "We can do that with the dragons because they don't have any parental instincts worth mentioning post-hatching. Maintaining the sanity of the looper is less of a concern... but for humans, it's different."

Robinton was nodding along. "So," he said softly. "When Yggdrasil is finally back to normal, then everything that has ever happened in any and all loops â€" every cruelty, every joy, every evil and good â€" will be there?"

"Will be available," Hel clarified. "It's going to be the work of an infinite lifetime working out what we absolutely have to get rid of, but hopefully it won't be much by comparison."

Fenrir looked up from his glass. "One of the things which makes me a little unusual, as admins go, is that I'm much more able to scorch parts of what would be considered read-only or read-write. Part of the whole... world devourer, thing."

It is interesting, Zair said, softly, to know that our work is not for naught. Every time we change things for the better, it is not lost.

"And every time things go badly," Robinton huffed.

He shook his head, customary smile returning. "Well â€" sorry for dampening the mood! Perhaps we should move to lighter matters. Who among you can sing? There's a gather tomorrow!"

Everyone looked at Sleipnir.

"I'm not that good..." he said, shaking his head. "And you're not getting me on the stage."

"Perhaps," Loki said, smiling. "And maybe the horse will learn to sing."

Robinton winced. "Ow. I think they felt that one in Benden Weyr."

There was a crash from outside.

"Lemaaaaaan!"

"Look, I'll get Vulkan to make you a new pen! He's a Smith here!"

Another crash.

Robinton let out a deep breath. "I suppose I should go make sure I still have a MasterCraftHall. If you'll excuse me..."

* * *

><p>13.4<p>

* * *

><p>"Ready for this, Storm?" Hal asked, looking up at the eastern sky.<p>

Dawn was breaking. Dawn, on the first day of the Roche War. Or the City War. Or the Kings and Barons War, or the War of Kailas' Folly, or whatever the hells they'd call it this time.

Hal hoped it'd be called the Short War one of these loops.

Storm honked, moderately unhappy, and examined the contraptions slung off his carapace and fastened to his legs.

"I know, I know," Hal sighed. "But you can carry the bugger, we tested that. Let's get going."

The green dragon sighed, then nodded. Hal swung himself up onto Storm's back, and tapped his carapace. "_Hup_ we go."

Storm gave him a dirty look, and then very deliberately pushed himself off the ground and clawed skywards with cupped wings.

The leathery surfaces snapped and crackled as the wind strained against them, as Storm fought to lift not just himself and his rider but a complicated contraption of buttons and wires " and six tonnes of forged steel and Torpex.

"At least there won't be much in the way of damned enemy flyers," Hal muttered. "Nope, too soon in the war for that."

He tapped the action on his rifle, though. Just in case.

* * *

><p>Storm crossed the coast at an altitude of over a mile, staying so high he was barely a speck to those on the ground, and continued flying " easier, now he no longer had to gain height so fast.<p>

He still let out the occasional mutter of complaint as he flew, but he was more-or-less resigned to the task.

For long hours, they flew. Hal occasionally got out his map to take sightings, but after this long he knew the Three Countries like the back of his damned _hand_.

Right. Down there were the ridges... that was a former Free City mashed flat under the rule of the queen's father, a charming bastard of a man just like his daughter...

And there it was. The capital of Roche.

"Straight and level, Storm," Hal reminded him, hitting controls and setting parameters. Wind... meh, a few knots, the clouds around are barely moving... speed set... right. Just hold that course."

Storm held his wings out stiffly, keeping his course true, and Hal focused the graticule of the bomb-sight on the queen's central palace.

They'd be holding the first war council today. The one where they decided just how to conduct the war.

In... _that_ building.

"Here goes," he muttered, as the clock ticked down to zero.

Six tonnes of steel and high explosive dropped clear of Storm's belly with a _clunk_, and the green dragon rose noticeably as the weight left him before stabilizing himself a bit.

Hal reached out in a complicated manoeuvre to pull all the support gear into his Pocket, then rubbed Storm's neck. "Good work!" he called. "Now, let's follow it down!"

Needing no further instruction, Storm flipped over into a dive.

* * *

><p>The large, sleek bomb dropped faster and faster. As it fell, the airstream tugged at the offset fins, making it rotate until it was spinning like a blur as it fell towards the ground.<p>

A white shock broke around it as it passed the sound barrier, and the gyroscopic spin kept it stable.

The last few hundred metres of the drop passed in about two seconds, and the Tallboy dug itself into the ground just outside the grand conference hall of Roche's nobles and barons.

For a moment, that was it.

Then the explosives went off, blowing a huge underground cavity out of the earth. The thin top layer held for a few seconds, and then the entire northern half of the conference chamber collapsed into the camouflet as it gave way.

* * *

><p>"I hope they get the bloody message..." Hal muttered, seeing a wisp of smoke curling up. "Gods, I hate war. But it's all I seem able to do..."<p>

Storm honked a question.

"No, I don't know."

* * *

><p>13.5<p>

* * *

><p>"Temeraire, dear one, I've done it!" Lawrence announced, entering the covert with a spring in his step.<p>

"What have you done, Lawrence?" Temeraire asked, raising his great head. "I had thought you had done enough, this-" _loop_- "last few years, with moving us from the covert down by Dover to a more salubrious location inland. With running water, yet."

"Oh, that's part of it," Lawrence smiled. "It's integral, in fact. How are you enjoying the park?"

"It is wonderful," Temeraire pronounced. "It is best positioned to stop those ghastly French shelling flights to London â€" where _did_ they get that notion of strategic bombardment? - and, as I say, the running water is a great comfort."

He frowned. "Though I do wonder why we couldn't be a little closer to the canal. I _do_ hear so much complaint when they bring the food and supplies up, wouldn't it be easier to be closer?"

"Easier, yes, but not quite according to my plan," Lawrence replied. "Now, the movement of the covert to Gatton Park was step one, and that was well enough accomplished. Now, step two."

He held up a folded slab of paper. "This is the Gazetter for today, picked up hot off the press in London yesterday evening. Listen-"

Flipping the paper open with a practiced motion, Lawrence read aloud. "Be it known that, in recognition for the achievements of the British Dragonriders of all stripes, and especially in their dragons' unswerving sacrifice, they are granted the same qualifications by property as any human subject of His Majesty of similar means."

Temeraire's mind had worked through some of the logic, at least, in a trice. "Does that mean â€" we are enfranchised?"

"You most certainly are, dear one," Lawrence assured him. "You have easily enough in the property qualification, and pay Scot and Lot â€" I ensured it when we transferred over here. The same for Velocitas, and for Lily, and for ten of your fellows at the covert."

Lawrence beamed. "See?"

"I am afraid I do not," Temeraire apologized. "You will have to finish the chain of thought for me."

"You're resident right here," Lawrence informed him, pointing down. "Legally, I mean. All the dragons I mention are the same, and they have enough property to be enfranchised."

Temeraire blinked. "Wait-"

"Ah, now you get it!" Lawrence chuckled. "The hustings are next month, so be ready..."

* * *

><p>"Be it known that the following are considered for election in this borough of Gatton!" the returning officer announced. "They are Mark Wood, the landlord here, and the good man William Garrow!"<p>

"Actually, there's two more names on there," a polite voice said.

The returning officer glowered up at the dragon, and lost the glower in a landslide. He turned back to the paper, visibly shaken, and read off the other two names. "Also standing, Temeraire â€" known also as Lung Tien Xiang â€" and a lady known here only as Lily."

"That's better," Messoria nodded amicably.

"Don't see why you'd want them on there anyway," the returning officer said, shaking his head. "Not like..."

He blinked. "Oh. Oh, his lordship won't like this."

"He doesn't have to like it," Messoria smiled. "It's the law."

* * *

><p>"I think that went well," Lawrence said, the next morning.<p>

"Well, you would say that, it was your plan," Temeraire smiled. "I do feel a little sorry for mister Wood, after all we did sort of hijack his rotten borough."

He frowned suddenly. "How are we going to fit into the Commons?"

"That," Lawrence said, beatifically, "is their problem."

* * *

><p>13.6<p>

* * *

><p>Bloody, gods damned... of all the...

Bilbo Baggins blinked. Is that you, Smaug? You sound-

I look it! Smaug's mental tone was engulfed in simmering rage. Look, can you get Gandalf over here right now? I... The Dragon Dread sighed. I need assistance.

What with? Bilbo asked, concerned.

I've got no damned forelegs. I've fallen over and can't get up.

Bilbo can be forgiven for laughing until his face hurt.

* * *

><p>13.7<p>

* * *

><p>"Okay, Saphira, let's see if this works," Eragon said, checking the length of rope.<p>

If it does then I get the credit, Saphira shot back.

"Sure, sure."

Eragon aimed carefully, then threw the metallic peg over her side towards the middle of the Urgal force. "Ha!"

Already keeping an eye on the dragon overhead, the Urgals drew back from the impact point of the peg.

Chuckling, Eragon tapped Saphira's neck. "Go!"

She needed no further prompting.

* * *

><p>"So, explain this again?" Hrogthar asked. "You... did what?"<p>

"Saphira flew in a circle holding the rope about six inches above the ground," Eragon repeated. "We tripped the entire enemy army. At once."

Then we deployed the spider-web spells, Saphira cut in. _Long story short, there's a divisional strength unit of Urgals pretty much immobilized. I suggest capturing them._

"...what's a division?"

Both Eragon and Saphira ignored the question.

* * *

><p>13.8 (Tovath)<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup awoke next to the Royal stables. He finished giving Toothless a scratch before taking a look around. To the right was a large building that his in loop memories said was the Palace of the Golden Emperor, Barbarossa Rugner. He had been sent by the Head of the Dragon Knights to escort a group of soldiers to the Magician's Isle and back. Apparently escort meant give them a ride on dragonback in this case.<p>

So what do you think, buddy? he sent to Toothless.

The Dragon's Den looks like it will be just as comfortable as Pern.

replied Toothless. _And we won't have to worry about Thread._

This world no doubt has it's own problems. he saw a group approaching, _And we are likely about to find out what they are._

The people approachting looked like soldiers despite not wearing uniforms. They all had different weapons. He didn't know enough about the military structure of this country to know if this was an elite unit or a noble youngster and his lackeys. The young man in was around Hiccup's usual age. His eyes went wide when he caught sight of Hiccup, but he didn't say anything.

"Man, I was hoping to see a real Dragon Knight, but instead there's just this brat." said the youngest of the group.

"I'm sorry that I don't meet your expectations." said Hiccup with an eyeroll, "but isn't Toothless enough reason to be Awake."

* * *

><p>13.9 (Gamma Cavy)<p>

* * *

><p>Well this is new.

Hiccup paused in his gardening at Toothless's mental remark. It was hardly the first time they'd been to Arda after all, although it was the first time he'd replaced Sam Gamgee.

What is it? he sent back, glad that his partner had woken up at last. After the exhausting previous loop the dragon had let Hiccup know he was Awake, and promptly gone back to sleep.

Toothless told him. Hiccup began to laugh.

* * *

><p>Hiccup went through with the motions of Sam's role as the Fellowship traveled, putting the finishing details to their plan over his bond with Toothless. Fortunately Gandalf was Awake, and thus things would go off without a hitch. If the Istari had been unAwake they would've been much more cautious about what they could do with what Toothless had Awoken as. As it was there was zero risk to his partner in the plan, which was something both of them approved of. At a grinding noise he looked up, smirking, as the doors of Moria opened.<p>

The rest of the fellowship fell back in shock at the flame wreathed shadow seated on the stairs within, as the Watcher in the Water erupted from the lake behind them. Before anyone could react the Watcher's tentacles had grasped Frodo, lifting him high into the air. The shadowed figure's whip of blue flame lashed out, severing the tentacles holding Frodo instantly.

"It's about time someone got here and opened the gate," said the dragon turned Balrog irritably. "I was beginning to think I'd have to wait another hundred years. I'll help you on your quest on one condition. Do you have any fish I can eat?"

Hiccup savoured the expressions of the Fellowship as he pretended to get over his (faked) shock, and pulled a herring out of his Pocket. "I'm afraid this is all I have at the moment, milord," he said, keeping to character. "But if you're willing to wait a bit we can cook up this lake-fish a treat." He motioned to the dying Cthulu replica.

"That would be acceptable." _We can have so much fun with this, can't we Rider?_

We can indeed Toothless. _Do you suppose you'll be able to take that shape once this loop ends? It's an even better fit for the title Night Fury than your usual one._

Don't know. How do you suppose Saruman would act faced with Balrog me? Or Denthor, or Sauron?

Hilariously. You're a being on the same level as them, without the same restrictions the Istari have. _But lets not hit Denathor_.

Aww, why not?

He's an old man. Even if he is a bastard, there are some things we just don't do. Hiccup's smirk grew as he stared at the cooking squid. _Now, what should we do to the Nazgul?_

* * *

><p>13.10 (krspaceT)<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup did not like looping into the 1940's.<p>

When he looped into the 1940's, he always seemed to end up in Norway.

Now, most any other time, Norway was a wonderful place. It had good healthcare, services and beaches that Astrid looked absolutely stunning on.

But in the 1940s, Norway had a little problem...

A Nazi problem.

And this loop, unlike most, had Dragons...

The Nazi's had Dragons.

The Dragonwaffe was flying over Berk randomly shooting down fireballs like they were gun crazy nutjobs. (Which they were. They were Nazi's after all)

"Well...this loop sucks" was all Hiccup had to say on the subject. Poor Toothless, probably the mount of some crazy Anti-Seminite/Homophobe/Anti-Everything fiend...

Then the fireball nearly got him.

* * *

><p>Of course, apparation was a nice way to avoid being extra crispy, though Hiccup really had no idea where he hopped off too.<p>

Or where his eyebrows were, for that matter.

"Human, how is it you have come here?"

The glutteral voice that asked this question started the non-action Viking, causing him to rapidly turn...to see a large, hairy humanoid creature wielding a massive spear even his father would have called overkillll.

Hiccup was pretty sure it was not supposed to be here. As a Norway connoisseur, he was quite aware that Norway did not have...

"I am Captain Tsul'Kalu of the 3rd Canadian Sasquatch Thunderbird Force. Tell me, have you seen any dragonwaffe bombers in the area?"

Hiccup absently pointed in the direction he believed he came from, his mind pondering if Toothless was a beaked creature this loop.

* * *

><p>"So Toothless, who wins in a dogfight; Dragon riding Nazis with guns that don't have good range, or Sasquatch riding Thunderbirds with bigass spears like they are knights?"<p>

"Chirp," the recently hatched Thunderchick replied.

* * *

><p>13.11 (Evilhumour)<p>

* * *

><p>Stoic blinked as he was given an odd sight and was doing his best not to laugh.<p>

His son, who came in a tub from the heavens as his pre Awake self thought, was almost the perfect viking. He was strong, fast, powerfully quick and learned how to use all the weapons with ease.

The only hitch was that his son from the heavens preferred to work with Gobbers, happily being a smith opposed to a viking on a raid. Still he couldn't fault the boy that much.

Then his loops memories kicked as soon as the bright orange Monstrous Nightmare flew in, looking very annoyed. It might have to do with the fact he was both young and very small.

Vulkan, his son, looked at the dragon for a long time.

He then asked, with a hand over his mouth, "Leman?"

The dragon could only snort flame to show his annoyance and grumbled

loudly as both of the humans broke down in laughter.

* * *

><p>13.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

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><p>Hiccup blinked as someone banged on the door. As he walked over, his father came along to see a truly hilarious sight.<p>

"Greetings Hiccup," the young man said, with a cloak over his shoulder to hide his appearance but it was mostly pointless. Mostly because of the young colt next to him with four extra legs and a very long snake around the man's neck. "It seems that Fenrir has managed to get us back for turning him into a pup one too many times."

"Us?" the horse shot a glare at the man. "Mom, we're in your office when Fenrir and Marianne attacked. You dragged us in as an equine shield!"

The snake muttered something about being there too and a serpentine shield instead of a fat equine shield.

"Quiet boys," Loki grumbled, and then looked at the snickering loopers. "We just need a place to rest until we can get to the end of the loop."

* * *

><p>13.13 (Bardic Knowledge)<p>

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><p>This is Berk. It's not the most traditional place on Tarkir, but that's because Vikings don't exactly fit the theme. It's a little hard to keep up a proud tradition of sailing when the world doesn't even have a word for "ocean."

As a furthur departure from the world I knew from baseline, there doesn't seem to be a single dragon anywhere. Legend has it that they used to be everywhere, and each of the clans and their khans based themselves off each of the broods that attacked them.

The desert Abzan learned to endure. The Jeskai of clouds, cunning. The swamp-living Sultai are ruthless to the extreme. The Mardu don't really live anywhere, but their dragon-inspired swiftness means they don't need to. The Temur are ferocious, and living in the tundra, they kind of need it.

As for us? Well, we Vikings were attacked by all the dragons and so we adopted something from all of them. Solidarity, tactics, stealth, accuracy, stubbornness. We hit the jackpot. And yet-

"It just feels _wrong_, Hiccup."

Hiccup was jolted out of his musings by the voice of Stoick the Vast. He sighed, "I know, dad. It doesn't make sense either. We're _soulbound_ with our dragons. We almost _never_ Loop apart."

"It's not just that, though I never thought it was possible to feel lonely in my own head. Berk was defined by our dragons, both when we fought them and when you trained them. This Berk... feels like a shell."

Hiccup nodded. They stood in companionable silence, the only two Loopers Awake in Berk.

After a moment, Hiccup spoke. "Small perk, though: flying boats!"

Stoick allowed a small smile to form under his beard. "Aye, there is that."

Despite the lack of ocean, the Vikings of Tarkir still managed to pillage and loot like Hub-world Vikings thanks to some enterprising hiccup a couple generations ago that invented airships.

Several of them were lifting off now to go raid the Sultai for finery they would trade to one of the river villages. Which the Sultai or Mardu would later steal so the Vikings could steal it and trade it again. It was a pretty good cycle.

Immediately after the raiding party was off, Hiccup and Stoick perked up, feeling a ping that wasn't there at the start of the Loop.

"Late Awakening?" asked Stoick.

"I don't know, but I don't think it came from the village. Maybe it's one of the native Loopers. I wonder if they'll be able to find us."

Â«Yes.Â» Came an unknown voice in their heads. A clue appeared moments later as an honest-to-gods dragon descended from the sky, turning into a man as it landed. "My name is Sarkhan. Welcome to Tarkir and the Dominionian Loops."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Where- How- You were a dragon!"

Sarkhan laughed. "Yes, I was."

"But, our Loop memories say that there are no dragons," said Stoick.

"Currently." Sarkhan gestured to his staff. More specifically, to the half a hedron suspended from the top. "I was originally just going to perform my start-of-Loop ritual of saving Ugin, when my memories informed me of a new clan on Tarkir, so I decided to ping and stop by if there was a reply."

"Who's Ugin?" asked Hiccup.

"The Spirit Dragon. He was - and will be - the source of all dragons on Tarkir. Just over a thousand years ago, he was mortally wounded by Nicol Bolas and left to die. Every Loop, I go pick up this hedron shard and take it to Ugin's bones, which sends me back in time where I can save Ugin by putting him in a healing coma."

A shine entered Stoick's eyes. "And if he's not dead, the dragons return?"

"Yes."

Stoick cheered and lifted Sarkhan by the shoulders, spinning around, before setting the Planeswalker back down. "Do you hear that, Hiccup? They are in this Loop; they just don't exist right now!"

Hiccup blinked. "Did that sentence make sense before you said it?"

Sarkhan recovered from the giddy Viking's celebration quickly and chuckled at Hiccup's remark. "It made sense. Being involved in a major bit of time travel has made me brush up on my paradoxes. I'm guessing you have dragons in your home Loop?"

"Yeah. They used to raid us because of their queen's orders, but when I befriended one of them - my partner, Toothless - we killed the queen and they joined us. Berk became a village of dragon riders."

"Interesting," Sarkhan turned to look at the sky. "I guess I should get moving, reunite you with your dragons."

"Yeah. I hope there's time to pocket one of the ships still here before you change everything? I'd like to study the design."

"Yes. And don't worry, being a Looper tends to give one ripple-effect-proof memories. You'll remember both timelines."

Stoick shuddered. "I'm not sure I want to remember this... Berk without dragons."

"Just think of it this way, dad," Hiccup laid a hand on the chief's shoulder, "you'll appreciate them even more now."

Stoick nodded, thoughtfully.

"I'll come back after I'm done. I'd like to meet these dragons of yours." And with a wave and a ripple of transforming magic, Sarkhan took off for Ugin's Nexus.

Less than an hour later, Stoick and Hiccup watched as the airshipyard wavered and vanished, to be replaced with dragon pens. Moments later, they noticed that Valka was suddenly there as well, and their new memories told them that she had always been there, rather than killed during a raid on the Temur Frontier.

Hiccup! cried Toothless.

Said Anchor smiled as he felt as much as heard his partner's voice in his head. Hey, bud. You have no idea how good it is to feel you here.

Oh, really? I don't know about you, but it felt like I had been stuck in between for hours. Ugh, makes me almost not want to do it again. Or at least take a long, hot soak first.

Looking to his dad out of the corner of his eye revealed a broad smile on his face, likely from his own dragons' returned

presence.

"You said we were going to meet a friend of yours?" said Valka. "He certainly is taking his sweet time. What, is he from Silumgar's lot?"

"No, dear," replied Stoick. "He didn't really say which-" Stoick paused a moment to examine a new set of Loop memories for the right word. "-dragonlord he followed."

"Actually, dad, didn't he say something about Ugin?"

"You're right, son, he did."

"But... Ugin isn't one of the dragonlords. He's a legend. You both know that." Valka looked at them askance.

Hiccup half-shrugged. "Technically, our Bewilderbeast isn't one of them either, but he still grants us protection." Sure enough, the good alpha dragon rested in the background, keeping an eye on the skies. Legend had it that it had been that way since the ancient khans were all killed a thousand years ago, when the five dragonlords abolished the original clans, instituting their own.

"I suppose..."

Stoick stroked his beard. "Tell you what, Valka. Why don't we have a fly around Berk while we wait for him to get here? He does have a long way to come."

After a moment's thought, Valka agreed, and went off to find Cloudjumper, as Toothless, Thornado, and Blitsif all started towards Hiccup and Stoick.

Hiccup shook his head. "I don't know how Sarkhan keeps it straight, dad. I've been Looping a while, and having two sets of simultaneous in-Loop memories is fine once in a while but..."

"Almost makes you go cross-eyed, aye."

The pair of Looping Vikings had a good hug and scratch session with their dragons before joining Valka and Cloudjumper in the air. After a half-hour in the air, they were joined by a new dragon that Hiccup and Stoick recognized as Sarkhan. They had a quick race before returning to Berk, where Sarkhan was introduced as a special guest of the chief.

After the feast in his honour and a lively Norse party that lasted into the night, Sarkhan regretted to inform everyone that it was time for him to go. But he'd be glad to visit again sometime, even if he had to "go through some serious Loops" to do so.

* * *

><p>13.14 (Gamerex27)<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup and Toothless Awoke at the same time. Glancing around, they noticed that they were in a 21st Century Hub-Ish world, right

in front of a massive marble-and-steel hotel.<p>

Look familiar at all? Toothless asked. _This can't be the _real _Hub,_ he noted, noticing how none of the people walking around the streets seemed to give a second glance to him, much less run away from the giant black fire-breathing monster.

"Not really," his Co-Anchor said. "I remember that my Unawake Self wanted to go into here for some reason, so why not check it out?"

"Next?"

Looking towards the door again, Hiccup noticed a blue dragoness, holding a laser scanner of some sort in her forepaw. "Tickets, please."

"Uh..." Hiccup fumbled in his lowercase-letter Pockets for a moment, before producing two slips of paper marked in English, though the ink was too smudged for him to read in a language he wasn't born speaking. "Here?"

Grabbing the tickets, the dragoness ran her scanner over them for a few seconds, then nodded, motioning for them to enter the hotel with a flick of her tail. "Next!"

The moment they walked through the glass doors and entered the lobby, Toothless facepawed. _Oh. __**Oh**__. I get it now._

"I...yeah, me too," Hiccup sighed. "Another bad pun Loop. I should've seen it coming the second the Loop Memories hit."

"Dragoncon," both of them said in unison, staring at the thousands of dragons, dragon-riders, and other dragon-related entities walked, crawled, and flew all over the convention space.

* * *

><p>One barrel of raw fish, and a corndog, please, Toothless told the half-dragon running one of the many snack bars.

"So, you think anything here is worth checking out?" Hiccup asked his dragon, tossing a few dollar bills at the food vendor and taking a bite out of his food.

The Flying Contest won't be set up for another few hours, the new Hub Movie about us is sold out, and I don't see any point in getting famous dragons to sign pieces of paper, Toothless snorted. _Maybe we could get some novelty tee-shirts for the Dragonween prank you were talking about with Gobber?_

"Dragons from back home don't really have 'standard designs,'" Hiccup noted, "so we'd need the custom-made ones for a lot of them. Maybe we should just come back tomorrow? It looks like some of the other Dragon Loopers have 'panels' then, so maybe that will be more interesting."

* * *

><p>13.15 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

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><p>Smaug opened one eyelid and sniffed the air in his lair. The scent had once puzzled him, but being stuck in a time loop gives one time to practice even the most difficult of tasks. "Bilbo?" he asked.<p>

"Who else?" A short, stout little figure appeared from behind an immense gold-inlaid urn.

"You'd be surprised," the dragon said. "About eighty or ninety Loops ago this Lannister person took your place. He was much better at riddling than you are."

"Oh, steady on now," Bilbo protested, "let's see how clever you are dealing for the first time with something over a hundred times your own size!"

"Whatever." Smaug stirred himself from his bed of gold. "Thanks for letting me sleep in, by the way. I suppose I'll have to let those dwarves back in, hm?"

"First things first," Bilbo insisted, holding up a tiny golden fleck of concentrated evil.

"Ring. Right."

A toss, a rush to duck behind cover, a blinding flash of stellar heat, and a whiff of gases, and that was all.

"I was thinking we could give the contract negotiations gag another try," Smaug said. "Start by demanding one-fifth of the hoard for my own and let them dicker me down. I want to see if I can get Thorin to do the teapot dance in exchange for a thirty percent deduction-"

"Half a moment," Bilbo said, emerging from behind the stone pillar he'd ducked behind. "You mentioned my being replaced, and it made me wonder: do you ever have Loops where you're Awake and I'm not?"

"Sometimes," Smaug admitted. "Now about those contracts-"

"Could you tell me about one such? Did anything interesting occur?"

* * *

><p>Men, elves, orcs, trolls and others fought and died on the Morannon for possession of the Black Gate into Mordor. By the Shire Reckoning it was March 25, 1419- the last day of the Third Age of Arda.<p>

Gandalf stood near the standard-bearer of Gondor, sending explosive spells down the slag-heap and over the heads of its defenders into the unending ranks of Sauron's armies. On the other hill defended by the men of the West he saw Saruman blasting the enemy with equal fervor. That one thing- hauling Saruman back from the brink of his fall into corruption- had been his project for the Loop, and he'd

achieved it only at the cost of letting absolutely everything else run to baseline. The success hadn't even bought a friendly Isengard; without Saruman as a cat's paw, Sauron had taken the ancient fortress by subterfuge while its master was away. Rohan had still been squeezed by orc armies east and west, and the gap of Rohan had been closed to the Fellowship when the time came.

But it could be done. Saruman could be saved. And the white wizard had shown his worth at the battles of Helm's Deep and the Pellenor, and he was doing it again on this last, desperate field of battle... which, more and more often these Loops, Gandalf could prevent altogether. A steep price for the soul of an angel, he reflected. Maybe next time I can do better.

"The Eagles!" someone shouted. "The Eagles are coming!"

"Nay!" That was Legolas's voice rising over the clash of steel. "That is no bird of any kind! The dragon! Smaug has returned!"

Gandalf's heart sank. Never leave a live Looping dragon out of your calculations, Olorin you old fool! he thought to himself.

The lone line in the northern skies grew into an immense bat-winged drake, old and powerful, red-gold scales catching what light could get through the overhead murk from Mount Doom. As it flew overhead the fighting paused, as each side waited to see what the dragon's intentions were. Pulling up to a stall just above the walls connecting the Towers of the Teeth, Smaug slowly let himself settle into a perch atop the Black Gate, giving the defenders atop the walls plenty of time to move out of the way.

And then, to Gandalf's wonderment, the dragon pulled a dragon-sized electric guitar and amplifier out of nowhere. "In today's battle the Eagles will be covered by Smaug the Golden," the dragon said. His claws picked at the strings, producing tones much higher than an instrument that huge ought to have produced, the sound carrying across the battlefield.

Bards in later days would sing tales of the Battle Where the Dragon Sang, but only because Smaug would write the lyrics for them. To be fair, his voice wasn't half bad, and it carried:

Under dark desert stormclouds
>Cool wind in my scales
Harsh sound of the battle
>And the dying men's wails
Up ahead on the tower
>I saw a shimmering light
I felt the will of the Lidless Eye
>I was to join in the fight

There they fought in the gateway
>I heard the claxon bell
And I was wondering why men fight
>For permission to march into hell
Mount Doom glowed like a candle

>It showed me the way
I heard the voice of the Accursed One
>I thought I heard him say

Welcome to the Battle of Morannon
>Such a bloody place, such a blasted waste
Welcome to the Battle of Morannon
>Now begins the reign of Sauron again

_My mind was bitterly twisted
>Like through a spyglass lens
But I remembered the mortal fools

>Who I called friends
How they fought in the valley
>Sweet blood and sweat
And then I remembered
>How could I ever forget

_I shouted to the captains,
>Darkness I defied
Sauron said, "You cannot resist me
>But you're welcome to try"
And still his will is calling from far
away
>Ties a knot in the middle of my mind
Every time I hear him
say_

_Welcome to the Battle of Morannon
>Such a bloody place, such a blasted waste
Welcome to the Battle
of Morannon
>Middle Earth is mine, now you all must die

_Orcs and trolls to the left of me
>Easterlings to the right (and I said)
"You are all just prisoners
here
>Of your own device"
And on the master's tower
>I felt the Dark Lord's will
"Stab him with your steely blades-

>The dragon you must kill!"

_Last thing I remembered
>I was flying from the door
For I would not aid the Dark One
>In his futile little war
He thinks he has the victory
>But in that he's deceived
Today on Mount Doom his doom shall
fall!
>Stand fast, Gondor, and believe!

The dragon's guitar solo was cut short by the onrush of orcs charging
along the parapets from both towers, and their charge was cut short
in turn by the scream of the Ringwraiths. With shrieks they turned
their flying steeds south and sped towards Mount Doom, and the dragon
followed, leaving behind his giant guitar, two baffled and confused
armies, and an Istari with a splitting headache.

* * *

><p>"Er... nothing important," Smaug said, not meeting Bilbo's gaze.
"All I can say is, your wizard friend bears a grudge."<p>

* * *

><p>13.16<p>

* * *

><p>"No."<p>

Come on! Toothless wheedled. _It's appropriate and
everything._

"Still no." Hiccup shook his head firmly. "I don't care if you roped
in Gobber and Astrid for this, I don't care if you've written the
complete version of the song, I don't even care if you've negotiated

with over two hundred dragons to be the backing singers!"

But it'd be funny.

"A persuasive argument, but not an airtight one."

Gobber would do it.

"I'm not singing a filked version of a Disney song called 'I just can't wait to be chief!' It's not even true!"

Spoilsport, Toothless muttered. _I'll go write something about Making A Viking Out Of You if that would make you happier..._

"...oh, go on then, we'll do that one."

* * *

><p>13.17<p>

* * *

><p>-Hiccup blinked.<p>

"Huh, unusually late..." he said to himself. _Toothless â€" be ready to handle Drago's Alpha, he's about to call it._

Right, Toothless sent back. _Should be a piece of â€" eh?_

Hiccup followed his gaze. "...what."

There was Valka's Alpha, all right. Standing there, white and resplendent, in front of the cliff face it had just melted through.

The strange thing about it, though, was that it was _not_ a Bewilderbeest.

"Since when was Mom's Alpha Kyurem?" Hiccup asked out loud, clinging on instinctively as Toothless put them through a barrel roll and avoided a barrage of ballista bolts.

Good question, Toothless replied, firing down a plasma bolt to neutralize one of those same ballistae. _But does this mean..._

Drago yelled out and waved his spear, and a moment later they had their answer. It did.

"Freeze shock!" Drago called. "Destroy him!"

"Ice burn!" Hiccup's mother called out in turn.

Plasma cannon! Toothless announced, flipping over and diving towards the icy explosions.

Hiccup just held on tight.

* * *

><p>13.18<p>

* * *

><p>-Dawn blinked, looking around.<p>

This was fairly new.

Big underground cavern, slowly filling up with people... she had a momentary thought that perhaps she was going to perform, but before she could follow up on that idea someone tapped her on the shoulder.

"Are you alright, my dear?" asked someone who somehow reminded Dawn of Professor Oak. "Not wandering off into dreams of other worlds than Pern?"

"Pern?" Dawn repeated, a little confused, and the man's smile broadened.

"Aha, I thought so. Welcome to our loop, young woman. If you'll follow me, I'll explain once we're seated."

There was a resonant hum which made the cavern seem to sing, provoking a few awed gasps from the audience, and Dawn decided to follow the local looper until she was properly settled.

* * *

><p>"Pern, Pern..." she mused, as she took her seat - this man she was with seemed quite important, if he was able to get a front row seat despite his height. "I've heard the name..."<p>

"Well, I'm touched that we're famous but saddened that what for is not," he said, seating himself. "I should introduce myself before we go any further. I am Robinton, Master Harper."

"...master what?" Dawn blinked.

"I can sing, play, compose or even make an instrument. Just don't ask me to dance, at least not after I've had as much wine as I prefer," Robinton winked at her. He gestured, and with a flicker a winged bronze creature about as big overall as a Treecko landed on his shoulder. "Ah, Zair. What kept you?"

The bronze animal - he looked a little like a Dragon-type to Dawn, if she went by her baseline experience - regarded him with whirling blue eyes. _I was busy doing things. Mnementh and Ramoth send their love._

"I heard him!" Dawn said, pitching her voice low. "Is he Psychic?"

I most certainly am, Zair told her. _Hasn't she been here before?_

"Alas, no," Robinton said. "How are your loop memories coming, miss...?"

"Dawn," Dawn supplied. "And they're taking a while..."

"Well, I'll supply the simple version," Robinton said. He hesitated a moment, looking up into the cavern, and then another of those deep _thrummmmmms_ came. This one louder, and closer.

"Pern is many things, but the most well-known one is â€" _dragons._"

As he said that, timed to the second, the dragons of Benden began to file into the hatching grounds to watch the event.

Dawn jumped as she realized the great sandy lump lying at the far end of the arena _moved_, revealing itself to be an enormous golden dragon.

Ramoht, her loop memories prompted. Then they all came in a rush, and she blinked.

"Oh, I see," she said. "This is a hatching. So... I guess this is where people and dragons become partners?"

"That's correct!" Robinton smiled. "Now, if you don't mind, let's leave the discussion of your time here until later â€" I never tire of watching a hatching."

* * *

><p>It was quite the experience.<p>

Dawn's closest parallel to it was that it was like watching a whole class of trainers getting their first PokÃ©mon at once â€" except that the nature of the dragon-bond meant that they were fast friends in a moment.

Or perhaps it was like meeting an old friend again after a long time apart - except that it was a new experience.

"Yes, it's quite something, isn't it?" Robinton asked, a smile quirking his lips. "I remember when I Impressed Zair, and that was a magical-"

He kept talking, but Dawn didn't hear him. All her attention was abruptly focused on something else.

You have got to be kidding me, said a grumpy and touchy and _familiar_ voice. _After all that trouble with dragons, now I _am _one?_

"Piplup?" Dawn breathed.

Dawn?

"Ah," Robinton said, now grinning broadly. "Well, young lady, go to him! He needs you."

How can I hear you without you speaking? Piplup asked, shaking his long serpentine neck in confusion, as Dawn clambered over the retaining wall and dropped to the sand. _I'm new to this whole Psychic type thing. Does this make me a Latios?_

Then he reached Dawn, and for a long moment there was only each other.

Is this what you think of me? Dawn asked, mental tone hushed. _I never realized..._

We argue, Piplup admitted. _But I do love you really._

* * *

><p>"Thanks for agreeing to see us," Dawn said, sighing.<p>

"It's not a problem at all, miss Dawn," F'lar - the local Anchor, apparently - told her. He passed over a glazed mug of some kind of juice, and she took a sip.

Do I get anything? Piplup asked.

F'lar nodded. "Bucket of fish under the table."

Dawn, can't you make some poffins soon? the former Water-type requested plaintively.

He was pretty quick to get eating the fish though.

"This thoughts thing..." Dawn asked, frowning. "Is it... permanent?"

"Depends if you want it to be," F'lar answered. "It fades if you don't want it, strengthens if you do. To answer your other question, it's got no known range limit but can't cross loops or times."

"That could actually be quite useful, in battle," Dawn said.

That assumes I'll want to listen to you.

"Quarrelsome sort, isn't he?" F'lar remarked mildly. "You said you were from a loop with PokÃ©mon?"

"That's right â€" Pikachu's branch," Dawn agreed.

"I've been in worlds like that a few times. Once Lessa and I were trainers in Hoenn... strangest thing was our starters."

"What were they?" Dawn asked, as Piplup laid his head on her lap and she began scratching the scales absently.

I am a teleporting, psychic dragon, the enormous bronze dragon at the other end of the chamber noted placidly.

"...they weren't Latios and Latias, were they?"

"Right in one," F'lar smiled. "That was a very short quest. Anyway, a quick rundown on our loop. The main duty of dragonriders is to battle Thread â€" a mindless organism from space with an uncanny resemblance to carnivorous pasta."

Dawn snorted.

"As a Bluerider â€" though of course there's already people having apoplectic fits over a female bluerider â€" you'll be naturally expected to fly with the others. I can _probably_ get you assigned elsewhere if you'd rather, though."

The coordinator shook her head. "No, I'm fine doing that. Uh... actually, does it matter if Piplup does a few non-standard things?"

Well, do not keep us in suspense, Mnementh said lightly.

"How would this death-pasta stuff do if it fell into a horizontal sheet of ice-cold mist?"

F'lar raised a hand like a fencer signalling a touch. "I can see you're a young lady with style."

"It's actually my normal job..." Dawn smiled.

"It is? Interesting. There's a few of Master Robinton's subordinates you might like to meet, in that case..."

* * *

><p>13.19<p>

* * *

><p>Bilbo Baggins pattered around the house, putting the odd fragile keepsake in a drawer and making sure he had enough food ready to cook.<p>

On today of all days, it mattered to be quite prepared.

"I wonder what it'll be this time," he said, thinking back to Gandalf's amused expression. That was probably a bad sign, but then again with Gandalf it was hard to tell...

There was a knock at the door. A knock which, to Bilbo's experienced ears, sounded about right for a Dwarf.

"Here we go again..."

* * *

><p>Some hours later, the worst was over.<p>

Thanks to Bilbo's careful preparation, his pantry even had things left in it. Which was an unexpected plus, actually - he'd have to remember how much he'd had in there today and make sure to have at least that much in future.

"So," he said, clapping his hands, and drawing the attention of all thirteen dwarves. "What, precisely, brings you to my home?"

"You mean the wizard didn't say?" Thorin asked, looking disquieted.

"No," Bilbo replied. "No he did not."

"Well," Fili began. "About four months ago, we received this letter."

He passed the folded paper over.

Bilbo had already recognized the smooth, white paper as being not of Arda, and therefore an artefact from a looper. The question was... whom?

Unfolding it, he read through " then blinked.

"Who," he asked, to cover his surprise, "is Smaug?"

"The Dragon of Erebor!" Dwalin said. "Drove us all out of dwarfhold and home... but, as you see, maybe we can go home."

Bilbo continued reading.

Smaug had written a long, rambling diatribe which seemed to consist largely of complaints about fluffy things and demented flowers. There was also more than a hint of whine, which was surprising to say the least given that Smaug could go toe-to-toe with a battlecruiser and win handily.

Smaug? he asked, through the link that remained from a long-ago trip to Pern. _What's going on?_

I hate partially fused loops, Smaug replied, sulkily.

* * *

><p>A few minutes later, Bilbo got to the end of the letter.<p>

_ '...and, therefore, in conclusion, I tell the dwarves of the Lonely Mountain - sod it. You can have the blasted infested mountain. Just try and get my books back from the little horrors._

Smaug the Incomparable.

Please forward all correspondence to new lair near Mt. Doom.

Bilbo blinked aside the realization that Smaug was about to invade Mordor by himself " and probably win " and turned to the letter's appendix.

When he saw what had driven Smaug from his lair, he stared, then began to laugh.

" 'tis no laughing matter, laddie!" Thrain said sharply. "These beasties drove out mighty Smaug!"

"That's because they're Fairy-type," Bilbo said, calming a bit, and comparing the sketches of a Slurpuff on one page and an Aromatisse on the next. "They're utterly immune to anything that's Draconic enough."

"You know of them?" Thorin asked. "I see why Gandalf suggested you! What weaknesses do they have?"

"Steel, mainly," Bilbo told him.

Thorin blinked. "That's actually quite anticlimactic."

Smaug? Bilbo asked, as the Dwarves began to talk among themselves. _Did you seriously get driven out of Erebor by a bunch of parrots, balloons, flowers, mime artists and animated desserts?_

We will NEVER speak of this again, Smaug muttered.

* * *

><p>13.20 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

* * *

><p>Rock and rubble rose from the plain of Gorgoroth, reshaping itself as it floated into the air. Enormous foundations emerged from under the broken debris of an older Age. Stones became bricks, forming neatly into almost seamless walls. With great swiftness a tower rose above the spur of the encircling Black Mountains, rising above all except the towering volcano that dominated the western horizon.<p>

Last of all, at the peak of the restored Barad-dur, two fanged towers reached into the air, and between them emerged a flame. It expanded into an eye, flickering its gaze back and forth across its realm, never blinking. The cat-slit pupil dilated and contracted as the Eye scanned near and far. The dread lord, He Whose Name is Forbidden, First Lieutenant of Melkor of Thangorodrim, Annatar Gift-Lord, Corruptor of Numenor, Lord of the Rings of Power, the spirit of fire and craft who men knew as Sauron had returned to his rightful home.

His rightful realm, of course, was all of Middle-Earth, but this realm was its core. The fertile volcanic soils of Nurn that fed his servants, the blasted wastes of Gorgoroth, the vale of Morannon, and the towers built by Men in a vain attempt to keep control of the cursed land- Cirith Ungol and the Towers of the Teeth- all lay in his power once more. Oh, that power wasn't yet at its peak- orcs and men needed to be reminded of their master and summoned to service, and fresh slaves needed to be brought from Harad, Rhun, and anywhere else raiding parties could find them. And his Ringwraiths were currently scattered and dismounted after Dol Guldur, but that could be remedied given time. And given the weakness of the one kingdom on his borders he could not directly control, he had plenty of-

The eye caught a glimpse of motion on the peak of Amon Amarth. With inhuman sight it focused its gaze on that mountain, seeing a great winged drake clinging to the very lip of the crater. Something tiny glinted in one clawed talon.

The shining thing sang to its master.

In certain ways Sauron was the most powerful thing in Arda, but in others the weakest. Without the Ring he could not maintain a proper body- only a shadow or a flame, and Dol Guldur had put an end to the usefulness of shadow. His mind and will could reach for hundreds of leagues, but his spirit could move less quickly than a lame beggar

human in some filthy town alley. If any servant of his had been near the dragon, they would have thrown themselves into its maw attempting to wrest its treasure away for their Lord... but there wasn't the tiniest goblin, let alone a proper sorcerer or nazgul, within miles of Mount Doom.

The dragon looked towards Barad-dur. Its eyes easily perceived the stare of the Lidless Eye and looked right back at it, unafraid. It stretched its claws out into the scalding plume of smoke and ash.

Helpless, terrified, the Eye rotated back and forth like a man shaking its head. Even without a lid or brow, it affected a look of pleading.

The dragon smiled and slowly nodded its head up and down.

The Eye shook faster, silently begging, denying, hoping.

The dragon nodded again, smiling a bit more broadly.

The Eye stared.

The dragon parted its claws, and the tiny golden singing thing fell into the fires of Doom.

* * *

><p>"Well, that was fun," Smaug said a few minutes later, as he rode the thermal updrafts from Mount Doom's eruption and watched the newly restored Dark Tower collapse more completely than before, as a tiny shadowy spirit of malice was blown away on the west wind.<p>

* * *

><p>The young Ranger of the North, known only to his friends in Gondor as the Eagle, stared up at the enormous banner which had been spread across the open Black Gate of the Morannon.<p>

"_Welcome to Smaugland, Under New Management?"_ he read aloud. "_Help Wanted, Pest Exterminators, Dwarves Preferred, Inquire Within?"_

The wizard standing next to him chuckled as he read the last line: "_For references contact Mr. Baggins, Bag End, Hobbiton-over-Water, the Shire."_

"Gandalf, what is this all about?" the Ranger asked.

"All in good time, Aragorn," the wizard chuckled. "I recommend you tell Lord Ecthelion that his new neighbour promises to be much more pleasant to have around than the old."

* * *

><p>13.21<p>

* * *

><p>"...so," Astrid said, after a few minutes. "I'm the tough, no-nonsense beat cop who's trying to do their job despite a shrinking

budget."<p>

"Yep," Hiccup agreed, soothing a small dragon.

"And you're the eccentric dragon tamer who-"

"Sssh, I don't want him to explode." Hiccup ran his finger down the spine of the little swamp dragon, who slowly relaxed and began to purr. "Sorry to interrupt, Astrid, it's just that... there's kind of a mess."

Grabbing a handful of pellets, he stuffed them down the mouth of the startled dragon, who briefly inflated before going back to normal with a faint _hiss_.

"What was that?" Astrid asked, curious.

"Reaction inhibitor, stops their chemistry from trying to self-terminate." Hiccup put the dragon back in his cage, and shut the lid. "You were saying?"

"Right," Astrid nodded. "Well, I was saying, I've got to handle the Night Watch-"

A roar like that of a jet engine interrupted them.

"Toothless!" Hiccup called. "Stop trying to turn yourself into a multimelta!"

It's a project, the disgruntled Swamp Dragon muttered. _Can't you get that food mix which turns me into a rocket engine?_

"...if you're good."

* * *

><p>13.22<p>

* * *

><p>"Told you, that's not how it works!"<p>

"Like you're an expert all of a sudden!" Ruffnut snapped back.

"More of one than you!" Tuffnut told her.

"Since when have you been any kind of botanist?"

"Since I decided that cutting open the giant plant fungus was a stupid idea!"

The argument was about to continue â€" like most Thorston arguments, it could quite easily consume the whole loop â€" but one of their companions cut in. _Trouble!_

"What kind?" Tuffnut asked, still staring at his sister.

Droids! Belch 'pathed down from where they were flying top cover. _Those ones with the big jeezly sticks._

Want help? Barf added. _We can extract you with hardly any warning._

"Nah," Ruffnut decided. "We can take 'em."

"What's all this _we_ all of a sudden?" Tuffnut asked, but there wasn't any heat in it. "Paired Vapaad?"

"We don't know any other styles," Ruffnut replied, rolling her eyes.

"True that."

As the high-flying alien mount that was their paired dragon banked miles overhead, Ruffnut and Tuffnut both span one-hundred-eighty degrees until they were facing outwards.

"Three," they said together. "Two. One-"

A dozen Magnaguards crashed into the Felucia clearing, and two purple lightsabers blurred in deadly unison.

If there was one thing the Thorstens could agree on " and there was only one " it was that only a very select group of people could interrupt their arguments and live.

Droid bits fountained in all directions.

* * *

><p>AN:<p>

* * *

><p>Sorry about the delay, I've been busy.<p>

13.1: Book-scale Toothless is not rideable.

13.2: Hobbits gossip, but just consider you eccentric.

13.3: A bit of a peek at the back end.

13.4: Hal's aim is to prevent the war. This is involving a lot of trial and error.

13.5: Rotten borough. Very, very few voters.

13.6: Smaug is not happy with his movie form.

13.7: Bowling for Urgals.

13.8: Do not taunt happy fun Dragon.

13.9: Or the Balrog.

13.10: I don't know either.

13.11: Leman's got this thing where he's usually pretty small and young.

13.12: The family of Loki.

13.13: The Dragonspeaker. Well, one of them.

13.14: Certain conventions must be upheld.

13.15: The Eagles, or a filk version at least.

13.16: Speaking of filks.

13.17: White Kyurem and Black Kyurem.

13.18: Impressions make a certain Impression.

13.19: Fairy types are immune to Dragons.

13.20: Smaug is quite a persuasive house buyer.

13.21: Astrid Vimes does not have a drinking problem. She has a drinking pastime.

13.22: The Horrible Jedi Twins. Aim away from arms and face.

End
file.